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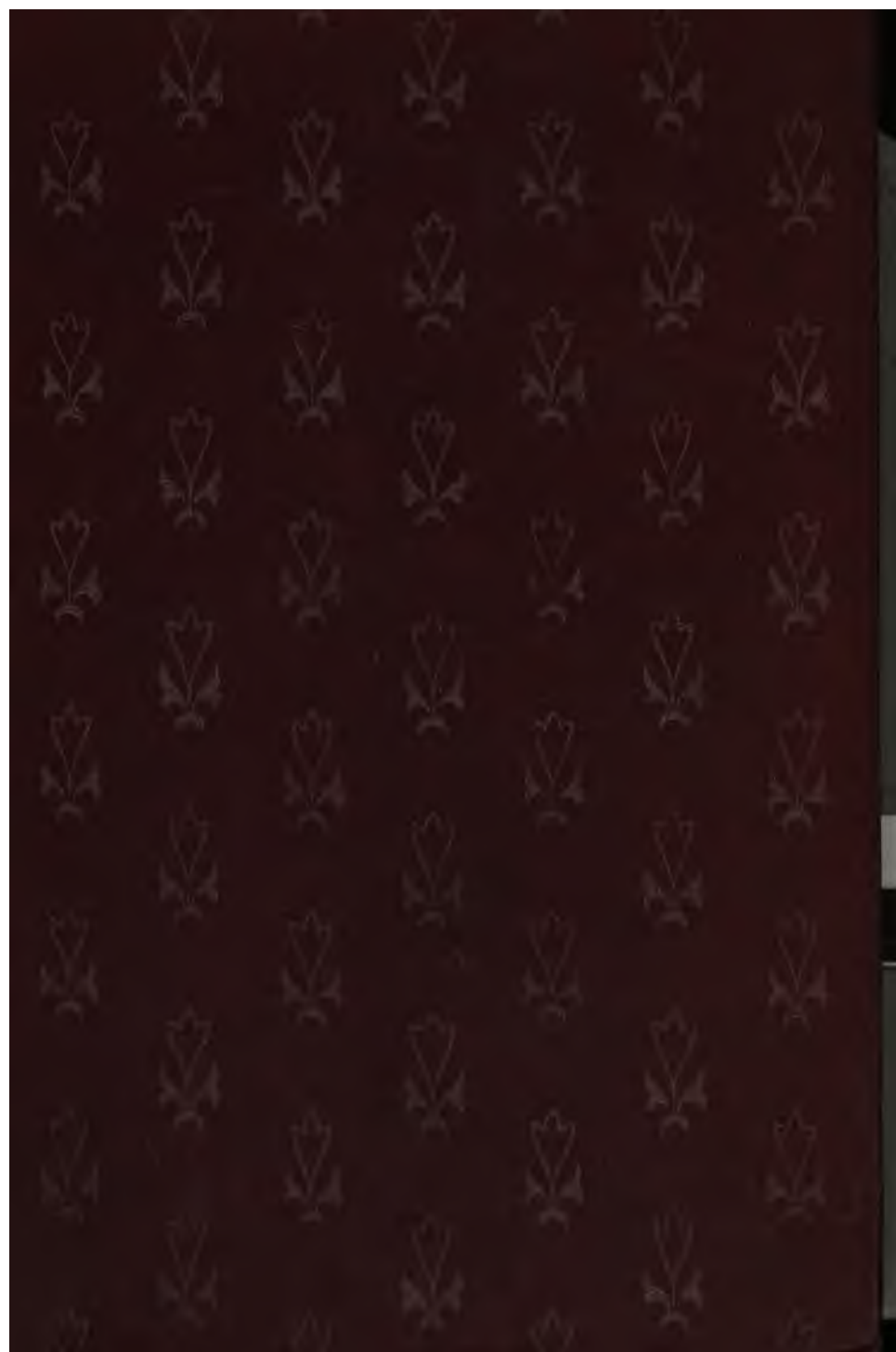
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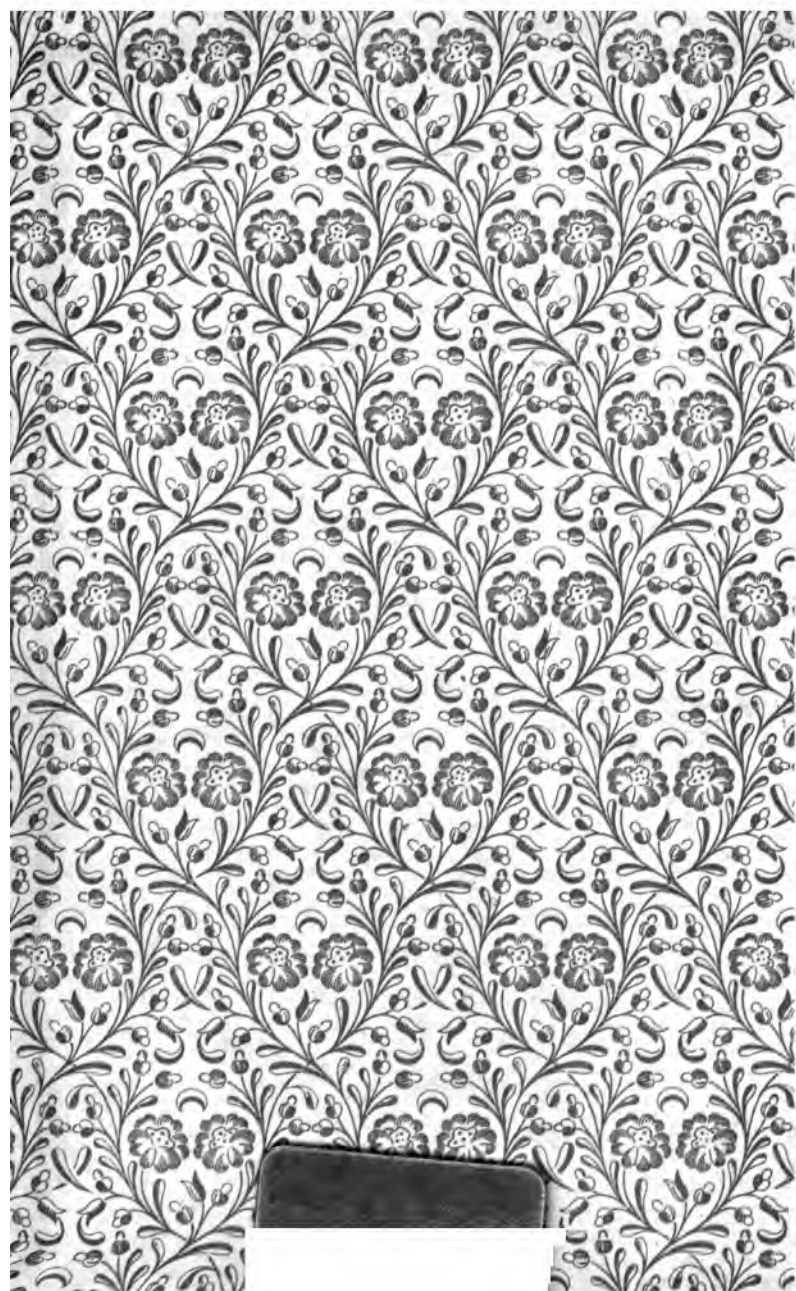
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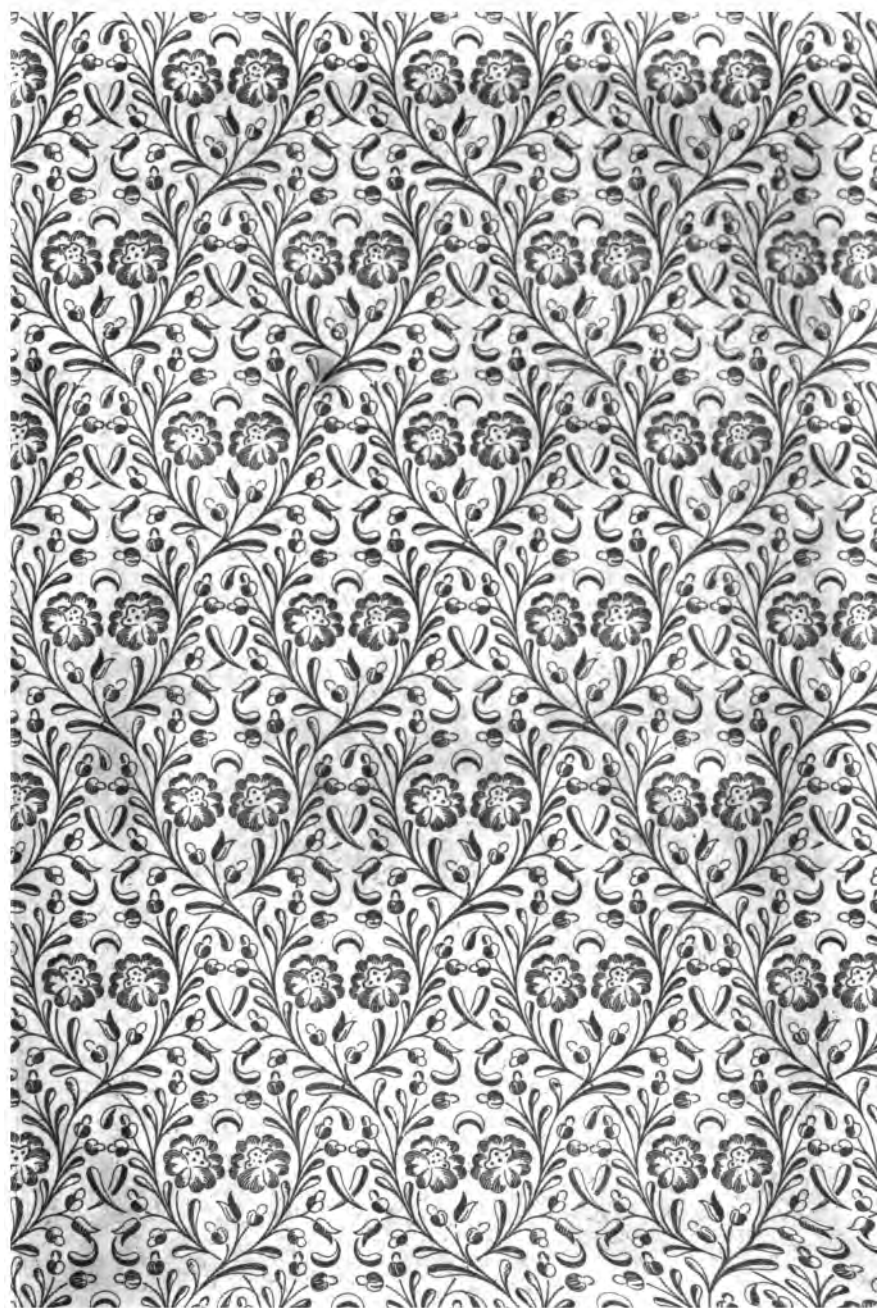
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*'Why, you foolish creature, you don't mean to say that you don't know you are beautiful!'*





*'Why, you foolish creature, you don't mean to say that you don't know you are beautiful!'*

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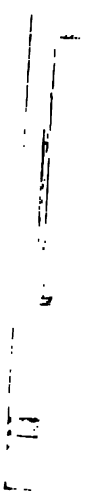
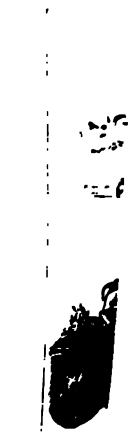
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# DONNA QUIXOTE

BY

JUSTIN MCCARTHY, M.P.

AUTHOR OF

'DEAR LADY DISDAIN' 'MISS MISANTHROPE' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

*With TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS by ARTHUR HOPKINS*

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# DONNA QUIXOTE.

## CHAPTER I.

### ‘WIDOWED WIFE AND WEDDED MAID.’

THE dawn came creeping slowly up over Genoa. It was the dawn of a beautiful morning in late autumn, when the Mediterranean shores of northern Italy look specially lovely; and yet this dawn showed livid and cheerless in the eyes of the watchers who became aware of its presence as they saw it stealing into a room in an hotel that looked upon the arched promenade and the port and the sea. ‘Ugly night’ is described in some lines of immortal beauty as coming breathing at the heels of the setting sun. The dawn sometimes looks uglier still as it comes breathing at the heels of the night, which threw at least a pitying and friendly shelter over tear-stained faces and weary eyes.

There were three or four persons in the room, and they were gathered round a death-bed. Albert Vanthorpe, a young Englishman of some three-and-twenty, had just died. The watchers had been with him all the night, and it was in the hopeless hush that followed the first assurance of his death that some of them became aware of the coming of the dawn. One of the watchers said in a low firm voice—

‘It is all over ; there is nothing else to be done. I should like to be left alone for a little, if you please ; I should like to be left alone—with my husband.’

One of the others, an elderly lady, seemed to hesitate ; she stood as if about to plead some objection. The younger said with a beseeching gesture—

‘Oh, yes ; even you too, dearest ! Only for a moment or two ; you will come back again. Just a moment or two.’

The elder lady and the others left the room without a word, and the wife was alone with her husband.

She was a very young wife, not to say a very young widow. She did not look quite twenty ; she was in fact a little more than twenty-one ; she was rather tall, and had a pale face that looked as if the melancholy dawn

were its proper setting. For all the haggardness given to her by the hour and the occasion, she was singularly handsome. She sat by the bedside of the young man who lay dead, and took one of his hands in hers. Her eyes sometimes wandered round the room which the dawn began faintly to light. A strange indescribable effect was wrought on her mind by the sight of objects that had belonged to him and now belonged to him no more—his clothes, some of his books, his watch, his chain, rings, purse; the presents that he had brought home to give to friends, the cigar-case, the silver-mounted revolver that he had lately been carrying—all these things that had no owner now; or, stranger still, had her for their owner. It was strange, indeed, to think that she alone had now the absolute right to sit beside him as he lay dead; that it was for her alone to say who should come into the room and who should be refused admission. It was very strange to think that people would come to her soon and ask her what was to be done with everything he had left behind, and that her word would be a law even as to the very place where his body was to lie. The other day she was a dreamy, impracticable girl, full of nonsensical ideas and

preposterous schemes ; and now she had a whole world of practical responsibilities put upon her and was absolutely independent of all control. She bent her face over the dead young man and kissed his chill, rigid hand ; not again and again as agonised mourners vainly do, but once timidly and respectfully.

This was not assuredly the sort of grief which a young wife just bereaved might be expected to feel. In all the strain and confusion of the moment's emotions, Gabrielle Ronalds was distinctly conscious of this ; she was as clearly aware of it as she was aware of the fact that the coming of the dawn was rendering the light of the soft lamps a superfluity. She knew that her regret for the dead man was not what the grief of a wife ought to be ; and she was conscious of a painful impression that her putting on the aspect of a widow's sorrow would in some measure be like the playing of a part, perhaps like that of a professional mourner hired for a funeral. If she could have lived her life over again and could have known what was coming, she would have tried to love him much more than she had done ; she would have compelled herself to love him ; she must have loved him. Nobody surely could have

deserved to be loved more than he had deserved love from her. Of course she was inclined to heap unmerited reproaches on herself now, and to make a crime of what was in the truest sense a duty. The only fault of which she could even in this remorseful moment accuse herself was, that she could not succeed in loving poor young Vanthorpe. She had never deceived him or herself as to her feelings: he knew that she did not love him; he knew more—he knew that she had tried her very best and failed. Now however, she kept telling herself over and over again of his goodness and her unworthiness; of his generous heart, his uncalculating, unchanging affection, which would have given everything and which got nothing; and she contrasted this with her own cold and deliberate study of her emotions and inclinations, and she told herself that she ought to feel penitent and ashamed.

After a while some one tapped lightly at the door, and she heard a voice calling the name that was his. She started, and turned her eyes instinctively to the bed, as if it must have been the dead man's name that was so inopportunistically spoken. She forgot for the moment that it was her own name; that, like all the



rest he once owned, it belonged to him no longer but only to her.

When we spoke of her as Gabrielle Ronalds a few lines back, it was by the name which belonged to her as an unmarried girl. Nothing could be more natural than to describe her in this way, for in truth she had hardly had time to recognise herself by the name which marriage had given her. She has not yet been three days a wife, and she is a wife only in name. The last few hours of her married life had been spent in watching with others at her young husband's death-bed. All this is not so mysterious or even so romantic as it may seem at first. Albert Vanthorpe had loved her since they were boy and girl together, and she had sometimes thought that she could love him. But she had always found when he pressed the question on her, or she pressed it on herself, that she could not, and at last saw her way and made up her mind clearly on the point. He was always in weakly health and he went on a long travelling expedition in order to get stronger; and for a while he was growing stronger, and every one who cared for him began to hope that he had a long career before him. Perhaps he grew too fully assured of his

own strength and he overtaxed it, and did all manner of toilsome and adventurous exploring feats, and he brought on his death. One day Gabrielle received a letter from him, dated from Genoa, telling her plainly that he had got thus far on his way home only to die, and in simple, pathetic tones asking her to give him the one only gratification he now could have in his closing hours—that of calling her his wife even for once before he died. To her who knew so well his sweet, soft, somewhat feminine nature, this wish seemed peculiarly characteristic of him. She reproached herself that she had not forced herself to love him in time; and if he had now asked her to become his wife with the view that she might be burnt as his widow on his funeral pile, she was well in the mood to have uncompromisingly accepted the offer. She agreed to marry him, and she and his mother went out to Genoa together. There was no difficulty there in having his last romantic whim gratified.

The event which he expected was nearer even than he had anticipated, and he died, as we have said, within three days after his marriage. He had had a will prepared, and he had it brought to him immediately after

the marriage ceremony, and he read it over and signed it and had it properly attested. Gabrielle wondered that he could think of such things then, but he smiled with a peculiar melancholy sweetness at her, and murmured something about marriage altering a man's will, or something of the kind—she hardly knew what. When this was all done and the lawyer was gone he took her hand and kissed it, and told her he was now happy, for he had made her his wife and had made her rich.

‘Oh, I remember all your plans and projects,’ he said, ‘and now you can carry some of them out. You will be able to do good to somebody, at all events; and I should never have known the way how, and so that’s all right.’

He smiled another of his boyish smiles, and the smile brought a pang to her heart. She had always complained of him for being too boyish, and had sometimes impatiently given that as a reason why she could not marry him. He was older than she, but she had often talked and thought of him as if he were only a child. She was constantly complaining that he did not try to turn his life to any account, and had compared

him more than once to Richard Carstone in 'Bleak House,' the young man who keeps to nothing, and dies saying he is just going to begin the world in earnest. 'If he should remember that now,' she thought with terror, and remind her of it, and tell her that her comparison was made good at last. But he did not remember it, or at least he did not say anything about it. He did remind her, however, that she had often told him that anybody with his fortune ought to be ashamed not to do some good for the world; 'and now,' he whispered, 'I am doing some good for the world; for I am giving you the chance of doing good, and you know how to make use of it. So you see I am not quite such a foolish boy after all.'

Now it is all over. The dawn has come; the young life has gone. Some one is calling to her, is calling her by his name, and she is now and henceforth Mrs. Albert Vanthorpe, a wife and a widow at once. She is very calm and composed to all appearance, and she goes out, and talks, and gives directions in a low firm tone, so that sometimes those who speak with her think she does not feel anything about what has happened; and those who know a little more of her story say to them-

selves, that of course she can't be expected to care much ; that she had refused him before, and only married him now because he couldn't live, and to please him ; and that she was to have a great deal of money. Still, the German chambermaid thought she might try to look a little more as if she was sorry ; and the Italian nurse said she had seen many young widows in her time, but she did not remember ever to have seen one that took sorrow as easily as that. The English doctor who had been brought with the young man's mother and Gabrielle from Harley Street, and who could do nothing whatever but say a soft word or two to the hopeless patient, had taken Gabrielle's hand kindly in his and felt her pulse, and looked into her large tearless eyes, and told her to be sure she left Genoa as soon as possible and got back to the active life of England ; and impressed upon her in low warning tones that she must still have many duties, and that the husband she had lost would think she was most faithful to his memory the more she tried to bear up and do them. For the doctor read the story of her calm demeanour so differently from the German chambermaid and the Italian nurse, that he had formed an uneasy suspicion

that the young widow was contemplating suicide. A woman is capable of anything, he said to himself, when she looks like that.

Meanwhile the mother of the dead man, who had been with him to the last, and had only left the room at Gabrielle's prayer when all was done, now sent in her maid to ask if she might see Mrs. Albert Vanthorpe.

The formality of the request surprised Gabrielle.

Of course she would see Mrs. Leven, but should she not go to her?

'Many thanks, no. Mrs. Leven would come to Mrs. Vanthorpe.'

Another moment and Mrs. Leven came. In the yet colourless dawn her face looked marvellously like that of her son. Gabrielle was going to meet her with all the affection due to their common suffering, but the elder woman cut her short at the very threshold.

'No more of that, thank you, between us. While he was living I would not give him a moment's pain'—her lips trembled as she looked at the white rigid face on the pillow; 'but now he cannot hear any more; and I have come to tell you that I am leaving Genoa at once, and that there is no reason why you and I should

meet in England or anywhere else. We could never be friends—never, never! I blame you for all this; if he had never seen you he would be alive and happy now; or if you had married him in time, when the poor foolish boy asked you, he might have been alive now.'

'But, Mrs. Leven,' the girl pleaded with scared, appealing face, 'you always said you liked me—you always said you were so fond of me. You praised me when first I said I couldn't marry him; you told me yourself I had done right.'

'I didn't know then that the poor boy was so mad about you; I would rather he married anybody than have been unhappy. He was always happy until lately; and I know now that he never cared for his mother this long time. You have his name now, and all the rest. I don't grudge you his money—you know that. I am glad you have it, for it will help you to make yourself ridiculous all the faster. I have only come to say now that I presume you will have my son buried with his father and his people.'

Gabrielle made a gesture as if in utter deprecation of any sinister purpose on her part.

'Of course I insist upon nothing,' Mrs. Leven went

on ; 'I have no right. If cremation or something of the kind should suit your ideas, I have no right to interfere. I am told that my son's will gives you express right to do as you think fit in that matter too.'

Gabrielle did not know ; she had not thought about the precise provisions of the will.

'Oh, yes ; you have the right to do as you please in everything. I only ask leave to remind you that my son was a gentleman ; that there is a burial-place where his father and his grandfather were buried before him, and where his mother hopes to be buried one day ; and where, before that time comes, she might wish sometimes to see her son's grave, if modern ideas would allow of so much concession to old-fashioned sentiment—that's all.'

Gabrielle only said—

'He is much more yours than mine, this poor boy, though he did give me his name. I don't know how you can think I would do anything—if you *do* think it—to give you any pain about him ; now, I mean ;' for she saw the expression forming itself on Mrs. Leven's face which would have said, 'Have you not given me pain enough about him ? Did you not take him from



me ?' So Gabrielle hastened to forestall superfluous contention with the one simple pathetic qualification 'now.'

'Well, that is all I have to say; and it is easily said. I hope we shan't meet any more.'

'Ought we to quarrel here ?' Gabrielle said, with a gesture towards the death-bed. 'If *he* could hear us, think how it would pain him.'

'I did think of that while he could hear us. You must admit that I never said a word all the time to make him suspect that I was not delighted with all the whole arrangement.'

'No; you deceived me as well as him,' Gabrielle said sadly; 'I thought you were still to me what you always were before.'

'I meant to spare him, and I did spare him.'

'I thank you for that with all my heart and soul.'

'Don't thank me in his name. Let me be spared that.'

The mother went to the side of the bed and knelt down and remained a while there—only a moment or two, as if in prayer. The young wife leaned upon the window-frame, turning her eyes purposely away from what was passing in the room, and looked vacuously

over the prospect of sea, and hills, and sails, that was spreading out clearer and more lovely in the brightening dawn. Her heart was full of pity for the bereaved woman who once loved her, and now seemed to have only hatred for her. The girl's memory went back to days when that woman's house was the happiest home to her; when Albert and she were children together; to days much later, when the mother and she good-humouredly engaged in competition, one to spoil the young man, and the other to strengthen him; to days when it no more entered into the heart of any of the three that they could ever be sundered in affection, than it occurred to them to think that the boy's career was to end in mere boyhood.

She looked back into the room; Mrs. Leven had risen from her knees and was going away. Gabrielle gave way to an impulse of old affection and devotion; she ran between her and the door, knelt down, caught her hand and pressed it to her lips. It was of no use. Mrs. Leven went resolutely and coldly out of the room, and the young widow was alone again with her husband.

Never were two friends more devoted than the woman who had just gone from the room and the mother of

the girl who was left there. When Gabrielle's mother died she had left her little daughter to the care of her friend, and had further made to the friend that faithful promise so often exacted by yearning affection, that if she could come back even for a moment, a shadow from the land of shadows, she would return to her friend to tell her of the whence and the whither. They were bound by the additional bond of affection that each was a widow, and each had but one child—at least, Albert's mother had only him to love. But look how things come about; a few years pass, and everything is unlike what the most cautious and calculating mind might have anticipated. The one thing reasonable would have seemed to be that this girl and boy should love each other and marry; and such seemed to be the arrangement of things developing itself, until suddenly the girl took it into her head that she could not love him, and that she would not marry him; and from that moment, as it seemed to his mother at least, all went wrong. The young man made himself intellectually and in all other ways the devoted slave of the girl who would not marry him. Her opinions upon everything were law to him; all her dreams, and whims, and odd new

ways were the inspirations of genius for him ; and the mother was not wrong in believing that a word from Gabrielle was more to him than a sermon or a precept from her. He never would listen to a word said even in complaint of Gabrielle's refusal of him. He was always a weak and tender-natured lad, his mother thought ; and this was one of the reasons why she would have wished Gabrielle to marry him, for the girl's vigour of intelligence and resolve would have counter-acted the defects of his temperament. He went away to travel, evidently still holding to a hope that he could persuade Gabrielle to love him yet, and having vague ideas of doing something gallant and good to deserve her ; and his mother, too, still looked for something of the kind. But Gabrielle would not hear of it, and at last left the home in which she had lived so long ; and Mrs. Leven being still a handsome woman, who had barely ceased to be young, was herself induced one day to marry again. Hers was a fitful nature, full of sudden emotion and impulse, and she accepted an offer of marriage, not very well knowing why she did so, but having a vague idea that, as she had been disappointed in everything, she had a right to pay off the

destinies by disappointing reasonable expectation in her own case. Then came the news that her boy was dying, and his passionate desire to be married to Gabrielle; and the mother was as angry in her heart with the girl for consenting to his entreaty now as for having refused it before. No question of money had anything to do with Mrs. Leven's anger. She had money of her own; her new husband was a man of considerable property. Her son's fortune, which was large, had all been left to him by his father's brother, who had made it as a successful railway contractor. Mrs. Leven had never liked him or his money either, and would, if left to herself, have much preferred that her son should be wholly dependent on her. Albert's having a fortune of his own to look out to always seemed to her the first cause of his coming to have ideas that were not hers, and of his being ready to accept the laws of life from the lips of a pretty girl rather than from those of one who had lived and suffered and known the world. She blamed Gabrielle for everything—her own second marriage among the rest. She blamed herself, indeed, for having as it were forced the girl on her son's notice; but she only condemned Gabrielle

now all the more for this. 'Without this lass,' says poor Caleb Balderstone, 'would not our ruin have been a'thegither fulfilled!' Mrs. Leven now thought even more bitterly of her dear old friend's daughter. Without that lass there would have been little to suggest a ruin of her hopes, to say nothing of ruin's fulfilment. Yet she kept down all her feelings for love of her son while she and Gabrielle were travelling to Genoa, and only revealed herself when Albert's ears could hear no more.

It must be owned that the position of the young woman who is now left alone in the dawn with the corpse of the youth whose name she has taken is sufficiently strange and trying even for the bravest spirit and the healthiest temperament. A new life indeed is that which is opening on her. She is a widow almost at the very moment of becoming a wife; she has lost the brother of her heart and of her childhood; she has lost the friend who was a mother to her, and seems to have found an enemy instead. Gabrielle never before thought of the possibility of her having an enemy, unless when in some of her dreamings she pictured herself as fearlessly frustrating the plans of the wicked in the cause

of the good, and thus winning the enmity of the children of darkness and being proud of it. She has lost much indeed ; and she has gained or had forced upon her what wise people would probably think most dangerous or fatal gifts for one so young and full of fancies : she has money and she has absolute independence.

## CHAPTER II.

## ‘THE GRACELESS GIRL.’

SOME months had passed since Albert Vanthorpe’s death. Summer had come upon London. Albert’s mother and her husband were at home. They lived in one of the streets running out of Piccadilly, in a small old-fashioned house which Major Leven’s family had owned for time out of mind. Major Leven’s family had belonged to quiet better-class respectability—if we may use such a phrase—for more generations than we venture to enumerate, neither sinking nor rising all the time.

Since Albert’s death they had lived in seclusion—that is, a sort of seclusion. Mrs. Leven saw nobody in the hostess’s sense, and of course went nowhere; but her husband was a very active and busy man, and his doors were almost as constantly open as those of the good Axlus in the ‘Iliad.’ It was for some time a



mystery to the friends of Major Leven and his wife alike, why these two should have married. Leven was fifty years old at least, and had always been set down as not a marrying man. But he had found much pleasure in the society of Mrs. Vanthorpe, as she then was, and in the people who used to go to her house ; and he took it into his head that she must be lonely without her son, when Albert went travelling all over the world ; and one day he asked her to marry him. As we have said, she accepted him out of a kind of spite against the destinies. If it were to do over again, she at least would probably not do it ; but he and she got on very well, and he was happy in his own way.

Major Leven had left the army, and had devoted himself to the wrongs of mankind. He had considerable means, and he gave up his time to the redressing of wrong. He had written more pamphlets and accompanied more deputations than perhaps any other man of his time. He had never succeeded in getting into parliament ; partly because he was always induced to come forward and contest some hopeless place where nobody but himself could possibly be induced to waste

time and money in such an endeavour, and partly because at the moment of every contest his soul was sure to be in some case of grievance which he would put forward as his great motive in entering parliament, and for which the constituents whose favour he sought could not be induced to care a rush. The chiefs and managers of parties swore at him a good deal among themselves, for he was always disturbing the arrangements of head-quarters everywhere and splitting up constituencies. When a contest between some representative of his own political party and an opponent was so nicely balanced as to leave to his own side only a confident hope of success, Major Leven was sure to appear in the field as the exponent of some cause, or case, or grievance, for which the chiefs cared nothing, to present himself as a candidate on that platform, and carry off just enough of eccentric votes to make the victory sure to the enemies of the party with whom, to use the correct phrase, Major Leven usually acted. If any foreign or colonial difficulty arose in the way of the Government, no matter to what party the Government belonged, Major Leven was instantly out with a pamphlet, in which, by the aid of portentous local know-

ledge, he made it clear that Her Majesty's ministers had bungled the affair from first to last ; that their official instructors evidently could not even find out on the map the places particularly concerned ; that no one in the Government service knew any of the languages which the emergency required to be known ; that he, Major Leven, had predicted in a pamphlet years before exactly what would happen, and at the same time shown exactly what ought to be done ; and that he could even now in ten minutes put any intelligent schoolboy in possession of knowledge enough to enable him to pull the Government out of the whole difficulty, if the Government would only have wit enough to allow themselves to be saved.

In private life Major Leven liked everybody and could hardly be persuaded to think ill of anybody ; but his creed as an observer of public men apparently was, that every Secretary of State was a double-dyed and unmitigated villain bent upon the ruin of his country. Major Leven believed what everyone told him, unless it were the statement of a minister made in public ; for all such statements he regarded as outrageous lies. His general impression was that all ministers, but more

especially foreign and colonial ministers, were scoundrels who ought to be impeached.

With all this, Major Leven was not a self-asserting or bumptious man. He was in manner a very modest, courteous, kindly gentleman; a little grave and heavy, as indeed was unavoidable in the case of one who bore on his shoulders such a burden of grievance. An oversensitive humanity, an implicit belief in what anybody told him in private, and a chivalric restlessness which did not allow him to hear of any grievance without feeling himself at once called to rush to the rescue, made him occasionally somewhat of a trouble to his friends.

He had no judgment whatever as to the rights and wrongs of any particular controversy, and was indeed generally secured by the side which first appealed to his attention. But he had considerable cleverness, when once a conviction had taken hold of him, in finding arguments to convince outsiders that that was the true side of the case. He had served a good deal and been in many parts of the world. When any grievance was brought under his notice, he had no difficulty in recalling some experience of his own which supplied him with reason for assuming that the wrong had been done.

When he was at the Cape, just the same sort of treachery had been shown to one of the native chiefs ; when he was at Rawul-Pindee he had had to interfere himself in exactly such a case of cruelty to a servant ; he knew of his own knowledge in the Mauritius that a fellow had been promoted to a most important office for no other reason in the world than because he had married the favourite maid of the Governor's wife ; and so on, through various other instances. Thus Major Leven was always able at a moment's notice to call himself as evidence to the truth of any case of alleged injustice about which it would be proper to worry a department.

Mrs. Leven was a good listener ; at least, she always seemed to listen to her husband's arguments and explanations, and was never seemingly tired. Her great quality for this purpose was a faculty of self-abstraction. At present she had only one thought occupying her mind, and that concerned her dead son and the girl he had married. But she listened with an air of deep attention ; and the air was not assumed, for she was absorbed in her own thoughts, only Major Leven naturally assumed that she was absorbed in his griev-

ances and not hers, and he was content with his audience.

Major Leven and his wife were at breakfast together. The table on Leven's side was covered with letters, newspapers, pamphlets, and proofs. It was thus he liked to breakfast. During the meal he had been interrupted more than once by important visitors; he liked to be interrupted. One of the visitors was young Walter Manny Taxal, second son of Lord Taxal, a nobleman who had been elevated to the peerage because he had finally proved his utter incapacity to serve his party in the House of Commons. Young Walter Manny Taxal was a fresh and clever youth with two sides to his character; he was an amateur musician and a popular agitator. He had a stronger voice than Major Leven and was a better speaker; but he believed in Leven, and was delighted to take his tone from him. He was about to preside this night over a great meeting of working men in St. James's Hall, and had come in to get some advice from Leven as to what he ought to say. The matter had been talked over, and Walter Manny was going away when he suddenly said—

‘Oh, by the way, Mrs. Leven, you can tell me, no

doubt. May I call upon your daughter—or would she rather I didn't yet awhile? I should like to, if I might.'

'On Mrs. Albert Vanthorpe?'

'Exactly; yes; Mrs. Albert Vanthorpe. I saw her in town yesterday. She is looking pale, but she is very handsome; handsomer than ever, I think.'

'I have not seen her,' Mrs. Leven said slowly, 'since my son's death. I don't know if she receives visits or not; I do not even know where she lives.'


'Oh, she lives in poor Albert's house, you know.'

'I presume so; I don't know.'

Walter Manny saw that he had, as he would have said himself, put his foot in it; he dropped the subject, and presently took his leave. Then Major Leven turned to his wife:

'Don't you think, you know, Constance, that the time has come to forget and forgive? Time to hold out the olive-branch a little, as old Melbourne used to say?'

'Not much time has passed, George; and I don't know that mere lapse of time does much in cases like mine. You can't be expected to feel as I do. I don't



make any accusation of that, dear; but he was nothing to you; I mean, he was not a son, and you could not understand how a mother feels. Why, the grass is hardly green on my boy's grave, and you talk of olive-branches.'

'Yes, yes, of course it's not long ago; and I know it's too soon for you not to feel as much as ever; but it isn't exactly that. I think you are wrong, Constance—I do, indeed—in putting any of the blame on her. You ladies are always a little unreasonable; and—you don't mind my speaking on so painful a subject?—I asked Dr. Saville particularly, and he told me most positively that poor Albert's death was certain years and years ago.'

Mrs. Leven only shook her head, but said nothing on this subject. She declined to be set right on a matter of such heart-and-soul conviction as that of the wrong done to her by her former favourite.

'I am told she never put on mourning for him,' Mrs. Leven said after a moment's pause, the uneasiness of which was chiefly occasioned to Major Leven by the fact that he had not yet quite got the particular thing said which he wanted to say; 'she dressed the day after



his death just as she did the day before. So they tell me.'

Major Leven was about to suggest that there might possibly be philosophical reasons very imperative on certain minds for wearing mourning before a melancholy and certain event rather than after it. But he checked himself in time, and spared his wife a speculation into which she could hardly be expected to enter very earnestly just then. Major Leven had in truth hardly known anything of poor Albert, and could only do his best to keep up with the feelings of his wife.

'All these new ideas, I suppose,' he said. 'You rather liked them at one time, Constance.'

'I did,' said Constance sadly. 'I did not know then that they could take any real hold on anybody's mind.'

'Still, really, you know, you ought not to blame her too much; and I do think, Constance, the time has come for making up the whole quarrel. I don't want to dictate to you, of course; but it's a sort of duty on my part—quite a duty, I feel it—to press you a little on this point. And then, another thing—he began to gain courage and resolution—'there is that other son of

yours. I don't know all the rights and wrongs of the story, but he must have been very young when you and he didn't get along ; and time has passed away, and he may have changed ; and some sad things have happened, and we must not bear anger always ; and I do think, Constance, you would do well to turn this over in your mind sometimes, and to remember that if you have lost a son you still have a son.'

'How do I know that I have a son ?' she asked. 'For all these long years he has never taken any pains to remind me that I had such a son. How do I know whether he is living or dead ? How do I know, if he is still living, into what sort of life he has fallen ? How do I know what his associates are, or his ways of life ? He may have married a gipsy or a dancing-woman for all I know.'

'He hasn't behaved well in not writing to you all this time, that's quite clear. A fellow's mother is his mother always, however they may have quarrelled ; but I fancy, Constance, he may have had a little of his mother's temperament in him, and for that, my dear, if you will allow me to say so, you are more responsible than he. But anyhow, I don't mean to press this matter

on you all at once. Just think it over, that's all I say. I felt it my duty to remind you of it. That's all.'

Mrs. Leven made no answer; one of her principles was that a woman should never contradict her husband. She held that the man was always to be regarded as supreme in his household, but she did not feel bound to translate her acknowledgment of his supremacy into action. She felt quite free to do just as she liked. She had not the least intention of acting on his advice in this case.

'Do you hear anything about her?' Major Leven asked; 'anything more, I mean, than that she hasn't put on mourning?'

Major Leven was really much interested in the fortunes of Albert's young wife. He had greatly admired Gabrielle when he used to meet her at Mrs. Leven's; she had always entered cordially into his projects. He was not by any means unconscious that with a good many purposeless persons he passed for a sort of bore; and he should in all ordinary cases have set down a handsome young woman as the least likely person in the world to enter cordially into his ideas. But Gabrielle had always paid him the delightful

homage of an evidently genuine interest in any project that he might have had in hand. He had seen her eyes sparkle with generous anger when he denounced the iniquity of some Secretary of State or other official ; she had come eagerly towards him to ask him about the result of some deputation to the Foreign or the Colonial Office concerning intolerable wrong inflicted on some meritorious race or individual.

‘I do hear about her now and then,’ his wife answered in a hesitating way, as if it were against her principles to own to any interest in such a woman. ‘I dare say she is forming a home for decayed old gentlewomen, or something of that kind ; or for strayed cats, perhaps ; I am not quite certain which. It is of no consequence, in any case. It won’t last long with her ; she will want some new piece of folly before long.’

Major Leven moved in his chair somewhat uneasily.

‘But,’ he said, ‘excuse me, Constance, did you actually hear that she was getting up a home for strayed cats ? It would not be a bad thing to do by any means, and I shouldn’t think the worse of her, only, is she doing anything of the kind, or is this only your conjecture ?’

‘I don’t hear much about her; I don’t desire to; but Mrs. Bramble, the wife of Albert’s old servant—you remember him?—comes sometimes here, and I have seen her, and she has told me now and then things about her. I did not ask her, but one could hardly refuse to listen to the poor old woman.’

‘Of course not. Certainly not. Why should you refuse? Well, she told you——?’

‘Oh, well, nothing very much, but that the young woman has all sorts of ridiculous persons coming to see her in Albert’s house, and makes it, I fancy, a sort of refuge for the destitute. Mrs. Bramble is her house-keeper, and old Thomas Bramble; I believe she considers them her friends, and entertains their poor relations; and there was something about a distressed cat --I have forgotten what it was. At all events, I know that my boy’s house is desecrated by her whims.’

Major Leven did not discuss the question any farther. He did not see much harm in what was told of Gabrielle, even if the worst were true. He was sure she would never forget to behave like a lady, he said to himself; from what he had seen of her he was quite satisfied that she would always be a lady. So he presently went to his

pamphlets and his deputations, not wholly dissatisfied with what he had said to his wife about her living son, and what he had heard her say about Gabrielle. She *does* keep asking questions about Gabrielle, or getting to know about her somehow, he thought. The reminder about the son will keep working in her memory.

Meanwhile, the young woman about whom the Levens had been talking was not engaged in organising a home for decayed ladies, or cats, or sufferers of any kind. It suited the warmth and bitterness of Mrs. Leven's present mood to represent her as a restless organiser of all manner of schemes and novelties ; but in truth Gabrielle had very little of the disciplined temperament which makes itself systematically useful. She was one of the last persons in the world likely to be of use as a member of a ladies' committee, nor had she of her own prompting much interest in an abstraction called a 'cause' of any kind. She used to admire Major Leven very much for the readiness with which he could at a moment's notice throw himself into the championship of people he had never seen ; the genuine anger which he could feel towards an entire department of

Government; the completeness with which he could enter into the cause, so to speak, of a whole parallel of latitude. She had often envied him this faculty, and blamed herself because she had not more of the same sort of spirit. But her own feelings were awakened chiefly by the condition of some particular man or woman. Her impulse towards help was always to hold out the helping hand herself. She was quite conscious that she wanted all the discipline of nature which makes a successful and useful worker in any good cause, and she assumed that she lacked that faculty because she was a woman and not a man. Wealth and poverty, we used to read in the days when Lindley Murray was yet studied, are both temptations. 'This excites pride; that discontent.' Neither temptation was put in the way of Gabrielle. In her early days she had been left with only a slender provision for herself; but, on the other hand, she had passed nearly all her growing years with Mrs. Leven, in whose household she certainly saw nothing like great wealth as wealth is rated in our times, but she always saw the evidences of sufficient money liberally spent. She never heard any talk of difficulties arising out of the want of money except

among the class who were generically described as 'the poor.' Mrs. Leven was a woman who delighted in having everything happy about her, and in hearing that she made those around her happy. Albert had his mother's love of happiness joined with a sweet, sunny temper all his own, which had none of his mother's fitfulness and sudden strong gusts of emotion. One might have thought a girl brought up amid such companionship would have taken the world easily and as it came, and readily accepted the conditions of things that showed so favourably for her.

But, whether from nature or from the sheer force of contrast, Gabrielle grew up the most impatient of mortals, so far as all arrangements here below were concerned. The framework of human society seemed to her to have got all out of gear; and what amused her friends more, she always went on as if on her were imposed in some way the duty of trying to put things right. She would stop in the streets, if she might, to argue with a drunken man, and convince him of the evil of the course he was pursuing. If a red-faced woman at an apple stall seemed chilly in the keen air of spring, Gabrielle regarded her as a victim to the



unequal laws of society, and wondered that no one would take her home, and give her some warmth and shelter until the summer days should come, when she might follow her trade in the sun without suffering from east winds and cold blasts. Nothing would have given the girl more pleasure than to seat herself at the stall every now and then and attend to the sales, in order to allow the poor apple-seller an occasional relief. She was constantly bringing all manner of objects of charity to the house which was her home. Some of the stories Mrs. Leven had heard were true enough. Outcast dogs, affrighted cats hunted of hideous school-boys, ragged girls who swept crossings, pretty, pathetic-looking organ boys, strapping lasses with saucy eyes who sold flowers—these and various other victims of social inequality had again and again partaken of the hospitality of Gabrielle's house. Nor was there anything in all this of that merely æsthetic benevolence which is only touched by picturesque suffering. It was the suffering itself which won Gabrielle's sympathy, not its attitude or its prettiness. She held society responsible for everything—especially in the days before she had come to trouble herself with any thought as

to what this all-neglecting, all-responsible society really was.

These ways were very amusing and even charming to Mrs. Leven for a long time. Gabrielle was so pretty and so graceful; there was such a fresh winningness in her perverse ways of looking at everything; she stuck by her nonsense so bravely; she lectured Albert with such a bewitching gravity, as if she were a Minerva-Mentor heaven-appointed to teach and guide and sometimes even drive him, that Albert's mother found her life greatly brightened by the companionship of this fascinating enthusiast. When Albert fell in love with Gabrielle, his mother was delighted; and even when Gabrielle refused Albert, the mother forgave her and went so far as to admit that she had done right according to her conscience, fully believing all the time that the scruples of conscience would give way, and that her boy would be made happy in the end. But when heavy disappointment fell upon all her hopes, she felt that she was growing to hate the girl. She hated her all the more because Albert would not hear a word that found fault with her. Then the melancholy end came; and she blamed Gabrielle at last for

everything that had happened, and felt towards her much as a lady of the middle ages might have felt towards some fair sorceress who had bewitched and betrayed her son.

## CHAPTER III.

MRS. ALBERT VANTHORPE.

THE house in which Gabrielle Vanthorpe lived was one of Albert's whims. Almost immediately after he had come of age, and when he still had hopes that Gabrielle would marry him, he had seen a pretty little house standing in a tiny enclosure of its own, the enclosure being itself enclosed in a corner of one of the parks. It was so surrounded by trees and so embedded in its corner, that one might pass by day after day without suspecting that the little gate led to any dwelling of mortal. Albert was delighted with it, set his heart upon it, succeeded in getting possession of it on a long lease, and had it furnished after his own favourite ideas. It was to be a surprise and a delight to Gabrielle if things came right; and when there was no possibility of things coming right any more for him in this world,

he had made it his express wish that Gabrielle should live in the house after his death. She had settled there now. It soothed her to be always in a place associated with his name; she would, if she might, have made every room in the little house a shrine of his memory. Like the father of whom Pliny tells us, she would have had the cherished image in brass, in marble, in wax, in every manner of substance, if she might. She resolved to keep the anniversary of his death as a day of mourning and solemn fast. Mrs. Leven was mistaken in supposing that she had made no change in her dress when Albert died. She always wore black, but she would not advertise herself as a widow by putting on the preposterous weeds.

In all that was meant as a tribute to his memory there was, it is needless to say, a virtual acknowledgment that that memory might possibly otherwise have faded. At least there was the evidence of regret and something like remorse, because she had not loved him. Gabrielle was determined to keep his memory green with her; the determination itself an all-sufficient proof that she had truly interpreted the feelings of her heart when she came to the conclusion that she could

not love him. Now that the bitterness of his death is past, and that every day is softening the force of regret into a tender and sweet emotion, it must be owned that Gabrielle Vanthorpe is not so unhappy as perhaps she ought to have been. Her deepest source of present regret is that her once loving friend, Mrs. Leven, seems to have hardened her heart against her. But Gabrielle is sure this will not last; and she has filled her soul with the determination to prove that she is worthy of that love which used to be like a mother's to her. Gabrielle has vague, magnificent purposes of doing so much good with the means Albert has left her, as to raise a very mound and monument of noble deeds as a tribute to his virtues and to the inspiration she has caught from them. Albert had had a servant who was once butler in his father's house and who afterwards married, and started a west-end lodging-house, which wholly failed and scattered all his and his wife's earnings to the winds. Gabrielle took up the pair, and put them in charge of the house and of herself as well.

There was one room in the house into which no mere visitor was ever admitted on any pretext. It was

Gabrielle's own room, but not sacred to herself. It was a room which Albert had intended to make his own study, and had begun fitting up for the purpose. Every shelf and book he had had put in remained as it was, and Gabrielle had brought from Genoa everything that had been his and stored them as sacred relics in this memorial room. It was on the ground-floor, and was almost darkened by the trees outside; the gloom gave it additional austerity as a chamber consecrated to the memory of one who was no more. If Gabrielle had ventured, she would have asked Mrs. Leven to give her some precious relic of each period of Albert's life, the memorials of each stage of growth and culture and whim and fad he had passed through, in order that this chamber of memory might illustrate his whole career. Over the chimney-piece was a large photograph of the cemetery in which he lay buried and of his grave. One who came and sat in this room even in gaudy summer might have almost fancied himself far away from the tumult of modern life, buried in the seclusion of some lonely demesne, whose rightful owner is dead, and which is a monument rather than a home.

At first the pale and melancholy face of Gabrielle seemed quite in keeping with the room she commonly occupied, but of late it must be owned that activity and youth were sending back the glow of health to the face of the young widow.

With all her eager, earnest ways, some of which ill-natured censors might perhaps have been tempted to describe as flighty, Gabrielle was a great lover at times of quietude and always of beauty. She delighted to surround herself with pretty things, and was made happy in a childlike way by colours and perfumes. She enjoyed the sight of fruits even more than their taste. While waiting to do great good for all who needed a helping hand, she meanwhile loved to adorn her rooms with what might have seemed to others superfluous decoration. She enjoyed profusion, although she could well enough have told her heart to put up with stint if needs were. There was a great deal that must have been fascinating in her present life. Its utter quiet at home, its absolute independence at home and abroad, the sense of sufficiency that it brought to her; perhaps, above all, the prospect of the marvellous good deeds she was to do, and the faint sound, heard long in



advance, of the voices that were to praise her for her good deeds—all these conditions poured a soft, sweet atmosphere around the romantic young woman's yet untried existence. Gabrielle had not many friends, but they were all such as she felt she could trust. They were all, it may as well be said, women. As yet she had not opened her door to any male visitor; Walter Manny Taxal would have applied in vain so far. Her friends were, as Mrs. Leven had remarked, of curiously varied classes of life.

One of her newest friends was Janet Charlton, a married niece of respectable Mrs. Bramble, the house-keeper. There were some fans and other trinkets of curious Oriental make which Albert had brought home for Gabrielle, and which had got broken or otherwise injured here and there; and Gabrielle wanted some artificer of delicate touch and trustworthy skill to whom they might be given for repair, or at least for preservation. Mrs. Bramble told Gabrielle she had a niece married to a man who could do just that sort of thing, and who made a living by it; she did assure Mrs. Vanthorpe ladies of the highest rank came to him, to repair their ornaments for them—things which they

wouldn't put into the hands of the first jeweller in town. They were so friendly, some of these ladies; oh, you could not think; why, she had known of countesses going and sitting for two hours together, chatting with Robert Charlton and his wife while he was doing the work they wanted to have done. Gabrielle did not suggest that possibly those great ladies sat there because they did not care to trust their ornaments out of their sight. She only said that she supposed if he could do the work to the satisfaction of such great persons he could satisfy her; and she sent him some jobs of work, beginning with the least precious, until she found that he really had a marvellous hand and could be trusted with anything. The work was sometimes brought back by his wife, and Gabrielle insisted on making her acquaintance. She was all the more impelled to this because Mrs. Bramble suggested in a mysterious way that, although Robert Charlton was a good husband, yet his wife had not always a very happy life of it.

Gabrielle was still more drawn to Janet Charlton when she saw her. First of all, Janet seemed absurdly young [for a wife; she looked more like a schoolgirl.

This was personally touching to Gabrielle. Next, she was singularly pretty, and even beautiful ; and Gabrielle, loving all beautiful things, loved dearly to look upon a beautiful woman. Then, too, Janet seemed so sweet, and innocent, and tender, so craving for care, and sympathy, and love, that Gabrielle thought it pity of her life if she could do nothing to relieve her of trouble, if trouble she really had. Gabrielle more than once tried gently to get at the young woman's confidence ; but either she had failed to touch the right chord, or Janet really did not think that anyone could want to know anything about so insignificant a creature as herself.

Janet had especially beautiful hair ; it was almost startling in its golden splendour. It was all gathered up in a great mass on the back of her head, and seemed as if, when let down, it might have clothed her in a robe of gold far finer and more becoming than Lesbia's. One day, when Janet had come to see her, Gabrielle could not keep from breaking out into raptures, to the young woman's blushing and perturbed face, about her glorious hair and her beauty.

‘ Why does not somebody paint you ? Do you know

any painters? I wish I were a painter for once; I could make a lovely picture of you. I never saw such hair.'

The young person thus complimented might be supposed to be gratified, but she did not seem so; on the contrary, she appeared rather to wince under the compliments. She faintly murmured, 'Oh, no; please don't say so—please don't.'

'Why, you foolish creature, you don't mean to say that you don't know you are beautiful? Has no one ever told you so? Does your husband never say so? Don't you ever look in the glass?'

The object of this appeal only grew more and more uneasy.

'This is genuine, I do believe,' Gabrielle said after a moment of bewilderment. 'It is real modesty! Men, I am sure, would not believe in such a thing; and I don't wonder. I should not have believed in it; here is a woman who positively does not like to be told, even by another woman, that she is beautiful!'

'Oh, no, please; it isn't that; it isn't modesty. Oh, no!'

‘It isn’t modesty?’ Gabrielle said, highly puzzled and amused. ‘Then what on earth is it, child?’

‘It’s only because I get into so much trouble by it! Oh, I do so wish I were not good-looking! I should be so happy if I were ugly! I wish I had the small-pox, or that I might cut off all this horrid hair.’

‘My dear creature, you are talking sacrilege, simple sacrilege. I should not wonder if the roof fell in——’

The uneasy fair one with golden locks actually glanced up with sudden fearfulness at the ceiling, apparently in alarm lest it might be going to descend.

Gabrielle saw the glance, and smiled and reassured her.

‘No, it won’t fall; don’t be alarmed; I did not mean that literally. But it sounds like a sin against beauty to hear you talk of cutting off that glorious hair. You would drive an artist wild, if he were to hear you talking in that manner.’

‘I don’t care,’ said the desperate little beauty. ‘I am often like to be driven wild myself.’

‘But why? What is the mystery? Come and tell me all about it, if it is no secret, and may be told. I have heard of the fatal gift of beauty, to be sure; but I always thought that where it belonged to a woman she was very proud of it, whether it brought fatality or not.’

‘They weren’t like me,’ the golden-haired one murmured; no doubt, having in her mind generally the women whose fatal gift of beauty was nevertheless a source of personal pride. ‘Oh no—if they had been they wouldn’t have liked it half so well, I can tell them.’

‘Can you really? Well, will you tell it to me? I should like to know what the conditions are that ever make a woman wish not to be beautiful.’

‘It’s because of my husband,’ the young woman said timidly, and casting a glance round the room as if fearful that he might be there listening to her revelation.

‘Why, is he bad to you? You do not look like that.’

‘Oh, no, he is not bad, he is very good; and he is very fond of me, and kind to me in other ways. But

he thinks I am too handsome ; and he makes me very miserable sometimes.'

'Thinks you too handsome? Would he rather you were not handsome? And if so, why did he marry you? Why didn't he find some ugly woman to suit his peculiar taste?'

'No, it isn't that,' and Janet could not keep from a faint smile. 'But he thinks people look at me, and that I attract attention, and I don't; oh, goodness knows, I don't want to—if he only knew. No one comes near the place but he worries me and insists on my going to hide; or says they are coming after me, and that they all admire me, and they don't, I do declare they don't; half of them never notice me, or think about me—why should they? I wish I never saw anyone; he and I could be very happy together if we never saw anybody.'

Gabrielle thought for a little. The distress of the poor young woman was evidently genuine; and, for all the whimsicality of its cause, was very touching.

'Well, you are a beautiful young woman, that is certain. But I may speak quite frankly to you, as you have such good cause not to be too vain of your charms;

and I must say that I think you would pass off quietly enough only for all that mass of lovely hair. You would be admired always by people who looked closely at you; but this is a busy age, and people in general don't give themselves much trouble about looking for beauty. I fancy no woman could go about with hair like that without being noticed; it is a challenge to all the world to stop and look. Now, if your husband would just let you cut that hair off close, and cover whatever had to be left neatly up in a little cap, you would not draw half the attention on you, and then you and he might be very happy.'

'Oh, but he wouldn't listen to it; he wouldn't hear a word of the kind. He admires my hair awfully; I dare not touch it—to cut any of it off, I mean.'

'I thought as much. That is the way with your self-tormentor always. There is a sure way of relief at hand, but he won't use it. Well, my poor child, yours is rather a hard case, and I should like to help you. I'll go and talk to your husband; he must be a man who can be talked to and argued with.'

'You go and talk to my husband?'

'Yes, child; why not? You won't be jealous?'



‘Oh, no;’ and Janet smiled a really bright and cheerful smile that it did good to Gabrielle to see.

‘Very well; *he* can’t be jealous. I am not a handsome young man drawn by your golden hair. Yes, I’ll go and talk to your husband, and see if I can’t bring him to reason.’

‘But if he knew that I had been telling, it would seem like complaining of him perhaps, and he might be angry.’

‘Set your mind at rest, child; I’ll not betray you. I will talk to him and get him to betray himself, and then I shall have an opportunity of giving him what people call a piece of my mind. Now we must arrange all this; I must come at a time when I shall be sure to see him, so that we may begin the acquaintance at once. It may take some time, you know, before my advice comes to have any effect. But it shall have effect in the end; for I am quite determined that something shall be done for you, and for him too. I can tell you I am not by any means without a certain sort of sympathy for him. It is something to have even an exaggerated emotion of love in such an age as this.’

‘Yes, I suppose it is,’ Mrs. Charlton said rather ruefully; ‘I suppose I ought to look at it in that light, and I do sometimes; but you have no idea how very, very trying it is; and to think how happy we might be, we two, only for this.’

There was something in this simple utterance which brought tears into the eyes of Gabrielle, she could not tell exactly why.

‘You must not mind that too much,’ she said quickly. ‘There are worse things to be endured in life than being thought too much of by one’s husband. But I hope we shall bring him to reason. Tell me—there are other people who live in the same house with you; other lodgers, I mean?’

Yes, there were several, Janet said. Were there any of these about whom her husband complained in any way? Well, yes; there was one young man who lived on the lower floor; but he never exchanged a word with her except the most commonplace civilities, such as he would offer to anyone else; and her husband liked him very well, and was very glad to talk to him sometimes; he was a very nice gentleman.

Now, Gabrielle had some trifling weaknesses of

character as well as some larger defects, and one of her weaknesses was that she was apt to be annoyed when persons of a class somewhat beneath her own, as she fancied, allowed themselves to describe their personal friends and associates as gentlemen and ladies. What does a man want with being called a gentleman, she was wont to argue, if he has not been brought up in the ways and with the education of the class who are called gentlemen? So long as he is a good and true man, that ought to be enough for him. If I—thus she would reason—were an intelligent man of the humbler class I should no more crave to be called a gentleman than to be called a bishop.

‘A gentleman?’ she asked with some little emphasis. ‘Do you really mean a gentleman, Mrs. Charlton, or simply a respectable and agreeable man?’

‘Oh, no; he is a real gentleman; at least, the people always say so. He looks like one, certainly.’

Gabrielle did not ask how it was that a gentleman came to live in the same place with Mrs. Charlton and her husband, partly because such a question would put very broadly the fact that she did not consider Mr. Charlton to be a gentleman, and partly because

she reflected in time that even a true gentleman may come to be poor and hide himself in obscurity in London. But it always irritated her when people had not the courage to stand by their own class.

‘Well, Mrs. Charlton, I shall be delighted to come and see you whenever you allow me; and I’ll do my best to bring your husband to reason. You and he ought to be very happy. You must give me a little time, you know, to make your husband’s acquaintance, and see what sort of man he is, and how one can best approach him. I suppose every man has ways and peculiarities of his own.’

‘I suppose so,’ the mild Mrs. Charlton said, willing to accept an opinion from any higher intelligence, although she was just on the verge of giving it as her conviction that all men were alike. It might have afforded a somewhat curious subject of contemplation to the student of human self-conceit, to find these two young women thus gravely laying down the law on the general character and moral constitution of man.

Janet Charlton was quite prepared to take her views from one who not only sympathised with her

troubles, but was confident she could help her out of them ; and she went homeward that evening almost indifferent to the curious or admiring glances which the passing stranger might throw after her. In all ordinary cases there was one terror which specially haunted the poor little beauty's mind. Suppose some evening, when she was returning home, she should be made the subject of unusually pertinacious attentions on the part of some admiring stranger ; suppose he persisted in following her ; and suppose just about that time her husband happened to be in the street and saw her ? He would be sure to think that she was encouraging the stranger's admiration ; and what would become of her ? On the other hand, how was she to act ? She had often thought the situation over, and could not see her way to any safe and satisfactory course of proceeding. Suppose she were to remonstrate with the seeming admirer, and he were to reply that he had never been thinking of her at all ; that he walked that way because his business led him thither, and that he presumed the streets were as free to him as to her ? What was she to do then ? She should only have made herself ridiculous for nothing. Then, besides, if her husband were to come

up at that particular moment he would be sure to regard her well-meant efforts as only an artful device for the purpose of drawing on herself the attention and admiration of some stranger who would otherwise have passed unheeding.

But this evening she was walking home with a heart free from such cares. She was not thinking of passing strangers or their admiration; they might admire or not, for all she cared; and if her husband had appeared in sight she would have hailed his coming with unmixed joy. The sweet kindly ways of the new friend she had just left filled her with delight. The firm, decisive manner of Mrs. Vanthorpe gave her entire confidence; such a lady, she thought—so sweet, so kind, so gracious, and so commanding, could do anything. She thought, too, of the delight it would give her husband if so splendid a lady as that were to come and talk with him in a friendly way; talk to him about books and the newspapers, and politics and wars, and things that she, his ignorant little wife, knew nothing about. It would be a great thing too that she, his ignorant little wife, had been the means of introducing Robert to this charming lady. That would be

some pride for her, and make her husband think more of her ; more of her good sense, that is, for she was sick of hearing about her beauty. It occurred to Janet, too, with a feeling of genuine satisfaction, that the lady was a great deal handsomer than she—oh, if one don't mind the hair, ever so much handsomer ; and then Robert might get to understand that a woman can be handsome without all the world running after her, and without any occasion for her to be tormented to death by her lawful guardians, or treated as if she ought to be kept in a glass case. Indeed, the world began to look very bright this evening to handsome golden-haired Janet. She found herself humming a tune as she walked on.

Her way was not short. It lay through one of the parks. The evening was bright and soft, and the sight of the grass and the sun and the sky and the trees sent a thrill half of delight half of pain through Janet's heart. There came back upon her the memories of the bright time when she lived in the country, and had the trees and the flowers always around her, and took a deep interest in the changes of the seasons, and used to think it delightful to go to the church on

Sunday ; to cross the fields and get to the church with the huge tree in front of the gate. It was in that church she first saw Robert ; and there she was married. She remembered not without a pang that she then thought it a glorious thing to go to live in London, which shone upon her imagination as a city of gold and marble, of parks and palaces. She was very loyal to her new life, and would not have admitted even to herself that she was not perfectly happy with her husband ; at least, that she would not be perfectly happy if he would only trouble himself and her less about her beauty and about what people thought of her. But still the London of which she had daily experience was certainly a very different place from the London in which she was once so proud to think that she was going to live. Just at this moment, however, as she is crossing the park, what with her new friend and her hope of Robert's being talked into reason, and the fine evening, and the grass and the trees, the London that she sees around her does somehow begin to look like the city of palaces and parks.

Her happiness was destined to a slight disturbance,



for just at that moment a cheery voice behind her was heard :

‘ Good evening, Mrs. Charlton ; one does not often see you out in this quarter. I am glad to have met you—or rather, I should say, to have overtaken you, for I have not met you. Do you remember the story about the slow walker and the snail ? ’

Poor Janet was not in a condition to remember that or any other story at the moment. She looked up alarmed and bewildered into the face of the young man who, as yet wholly unconscious of the emotion his presence was creating, was walking by her side and talking all the time. He was a tall young man, slight but strong, with something like the appearance of one who has not yet quite done growing—such promise did his chest and shoulders give when compared with the general slightness of his figure. He had a face with fine outlines, and a pair of sparkling dark eyes.

All Janet could say at first was, ‘ Oh, Mr. Fielding ! ’ and then—‘ you did so frighten me ! ’

‘ Frighten you ?—I’m sure I am very sorry ; I didn’t mean to frighten you. Are you going homeward ?

I am. May I walk with you? Shall I carry your basket for you?’

For Janet was bearing a basket in which she had some little delicacies bought for her husband’s tea.

‘Oh, no, thank you,’ she said in an alarmed tone. ‘I had rather walk alone, please. I am not sure; I don’t think I am going home; at least, I think I am going the other way.’

‘What, back again—the way you were coming?’

‘I don’t know if I have not forgotten something; I have been to call upon a lady; perhaps I had better go back.’

‘Come, why not say at once you don’t want to walk with me?’ he asked in a tone of perfect good-humour. ‘I am not in the least offended; I suppose I ought not to have offered my companionship; but really one forgets the proprieties sometimes. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Charlton; good evening. You need not turn back, for I shall get on a good deal faster than you are likely to do.’ He raised his hat to her and was going on.

‘But I am afraid you will think me rude, Mr. Fielding,’ she said timidly; ‘and I don’t mean to be,

indeed. And I am sure you only meant to be kind.'

'Really, I don't think I did, Mrs. Charlton, except to myself. I thought you were going my way, and I should like to have your company; I get a good deal of my own society, and I get tired of it now and then.'

'I am sure I should be delighted,' Janet stammered out, 'and you are so kind to say so—to say you would like it; but I don't suppose, perhaps—it might not be quite—oh, really, I don't know, Mr. Fielding; but I am very much obliged to you; and I want you not to think that I have been rude.'

She smiled with a half-alarmed eagerness that might perhaps have seemed an invitation to Mr. Fielding to remain in her company, but which was certainly not so intended by her, and was not so interpreted by him. He understood perfectly well what she meant; he could see without any trouble to his penetration that she was a kindly little modest creature, who for some reason or other thought she was bound to keep men at a severe distance. So he only said a word or two to assure her that he did not feel offended, and his tall

slight figure was very soon, at his rate of walking, a speck in the dim distance

Mrs. Charlton was troubled by the meeting. She was afraid that some one might have seen her who would tell Robert; she was greatly afraid that she had been rude, and had offended her well-meaning acquaintance; and again, she was afraid she had betrayed her fears so far as to let him guess that her husband was foolish and jealous. As she walked along, she wondered to herself again and again why women—at least, why married women—liked to be thought handsome. ‘If I were not thought handsome by Robert, or anybody,’ she kept saying to herself, ‘how friendly I might be with everyone, and how happy I might be!’ Her mind was a good deal occupied too by the prospect of the visit she was to have from Mrs. Vanthorpe. It was to be, moreover, not a visit but a series of visits. Mrs. Vanthorpe had talked of deliberately making Robert Charlton’s acquaintance; and that would take time and would involve a coming again and again. It was very likely too that Mrs. Vanthorpe would ask Robert and herself to tea some evening; and then if Robert could only be persuaded to put aside his odd

independent ways for once, and to accept the lady's invitation, how delightful it would be ; how charming to have Robert show how clever he was, and what books he had read ; and he would do so when he was at his ease, which he was sure to be very soon with so charming a lady. What a very young lady she was—what a young widow. Why, she did not look more than twenty ! How Robert would admire her ; and surely Mrs. Vanthorpe could not help liking Robert. The whole prospect was delightful. One little cloud was on it ; Mrs. Charlton hoped somehow that the young man she had just met would not happen to be anywhere in the way when the lady came. Gabrielle's doubt as to whether he was really a gentleman pressed upon the little woman's mind. ' Perhaps he isn't a gentleman,' she thought ; ' and if he isn't, I hope she won't see him at all.'

One question came up to Janet's mind many times during the next day or two. Would Mrs. Vanthorpe come in her carriage ? Would the carriage have one horse or two ? Would the carriage stop in the square out of which ran the narrow street in which the Charltons lived, or would it actually drive up to the

very door? Janet watched with unflagging attention for the sound of carriage wheels for two days, and after all did not know when her visitor was actually at the door. For Gabrielle, who was fond of walking and of seeing the streets, had merely set out on foot the third afternoon following Janet's visit, and walked briskly across the park and through a maze of streets, only stopping now and then to soothe crying children, and reason with wrangling or cat-persecuting urchins. At length she reached the square.

It was a very quiet, dull, decaying, grass-grown old square, somewhere in the region of the Foundling Hospital. Very few private houses were in the square; it was given up to charitable institutions and queer old libraries founded by long-forgotten oddities into whose awful cells no one ever seemed to enter. There were dispensaries, and little hospitals, and asylums for aged respectabilities there; but no mortal had ever seen a patient entering or borne into one of them, or a decayed respectability looking out of window or taking an airing in the sun. Glancing into one of the libraries, you could not fancy any modern reader studying there. One might, perhaps, form a conception of the founder

of the institution himself, in neat black small-clothes and shiny knee-buckles, and rigid, decorous pigtail, taking some of the books down from their mouldering shelves and lovingly whisking the dust from their snuff-coloured leaves, and timidly making himself air when the rattle of a chance cab below suggested the possibility of a knock at the door and a visitor from the living world outside.

Perhaps Gabrielle Vanthorpe was nursing some fancy of this kind as she walked round the old square in search of the little street to which she was bound. Gabrielle was fanciful enough usually, and, whenever she saw any peculiar-looking house, immediately fitted it up with some appropriate story. Because of some fancy or other, she stopped a moment when she came to the opening of the street she was seeking, and hesitated to go down. It was dark and narrow; it had one long row of tall, heavy, old-fashioned decaying houses; the other side was only a huge wall, bounding one of the mysterious institutions already mentioned. There was no egress at the other end of the street; a wall stopped it up. The whole place looked mournful and forbidding to Gabrielle; it seemed to her for

the moment that if she went down there something evil must come of it. She got over this feeling in a moment, however, and went down the street until she came to the house she was seeking. It was tall, grey, and melancholy. A mournful memory of decayed respectability seemed to cloud its high flight of crumbling steps.

Gabrielle knocked and rang again and again. She did not understand the economy of the number of little bell-handles which she saw at the side of the door, and rang the first, therefore, that came to her hand. At last the door opened, and a young man stood before her who began by saying—

‘I am sorry you have been kept so long. I heard the bell ring ever so many times; and at last it dawned upon me that somebody whom it concerned must be out, and that nobody whom it did not concern would take any trouble, and so I thought I had better come to the rescue.’

‘Do you know if Mrs. Charlton is at home?’ Gabrielle asked, when he had come to the end of his rapid little speech.

‘I don’t know, I’m sure. Very likely she is. Will



you come in for a moment, and I'll ring her bell for you. That's her bell, you see—second floor front.'

'Oh, that's her bell,' Gabrielle said, rather amused by his quick cheery way. 'I did not know.'

'Of course not; how could you know? You have never been here before, I suppose?'

'No; I have never been here before.'

'Your estate is the more gracious, I can assure you. Now, you see, I have rung Mrs. Charlton's bell, and she will be here in a moment. Won't you sit down? I'll bring you a chair from my room. It's not any trouble, not the least.'

'Thank you—no,' said Gabrielle. 'It is hardly worth while; I think I hear Mrs. Charlton coming.'

Gabrielle put on all the dignity she could call up on the instant, considering that she was, as we have said, rather amused by the eager courtesy of her new acquaintance, and was wondering within herself whether he was not about to ask her to take a seat in his room. At that moment Janet Charlton came rustling down the stairs. She blushed and grew confused when she saw Mrs. Vanthorpe and the lodger apparently in

friendly conversation. Very pretty and winning she looked in her embarrassment.

‘Oh, Mrs. Charlton,’ the young man said before she had time to put in a word, ‘here is a lady to see you. She might have been there long enough, I fancy, if I had not happened to observe that somebody was ringing at the bell, and that nothing was coming of it. There never was such a house as this. I believe there are servants, but what do they do, Mrs. Charlton—what do they do?’

‘I am sure I am greatly obliged to you,’ said the bewildered Janet. ‘I am so sorry, Mrs. Vanthorpe, to have kept you waiting. Will you be kind enough to come upstairs, Madame?’ She was almost overwhelmed at the thought of such a lady as Mrs. Vanthorpe being kept waiting in such a way, and was thinking to herself, ‘She will never come here again after all this.’

‘Vanthorpe?’ the young man suddenly asked, stopping short in the midst of the parting bow he was making. ‘Excuse me—did you say Vanthorpe?’

‘My name is Vanthorpe,’ Gabrielle answered gravely.

‘Miss Vanthorpe?’

‘I am Mrs. Vanthorpe,’ Gabrielle said. ‘Shall we go upstairs, Mrs. Charlton? Pray don’t make any apologies. I was not long waiting, and it was only my own mistake that caused any delay.’

She cut short anything the young man might have to say by a very chilling bow as she followed the confused and depressed Janet up the narrow staircase to the second floor. On their way up Janet contrived to cast back at the young man one wondering, reproachful glance that seemed to say, ‘Now you have done it. Oh, how could you be so odd?’

The lodger only raised his eyebrows and smiled at poor Janet wholly unabashed. He stood for a moment on the threshold of his own room as if thinking over some question which he hoped to settle in a moment.

‘Rather a rude young woman,’ he suddenly said aloud to himself. ‘I wonder if her husband, too, is jealous, and goes wild if anybody speaks to her.’

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE LODGERS IN BOLINGBROKE PLACE.

GABRIELLE followed Mrs. Charlton up the stairs ; but for the moment she was not thinking either of Janet or of her own purpose in coming to Janet's house. She was strangely impressed by the demeanour and the words of the odd young man she had seen on the staircase, and whom she at once identified in her own mind with the 'real gentleman' whom Janet had described to her, and concerning whom Mr. Charlton might possibly have been disposed to make himself foolishly uneasy. He seemed a gentleman, certainly, Gabrielle thought, although there was something abrupt and *sans gêne* in his manner that she did not like. But it was not his abruptness that impressed her especially ; it was the manner in which he had gone over her

name as if it affected him with some strange associations. Those who follow Gabrielle Vanthorpe's story will not be long in finding out that she was a young woman of a very lively imagination, marvellously ready to form impressions, jump to conclusions, and endow the fantasies of her own mind with flesh-and-blood reality. Even as she mounted the stairs to Janet's room, she was already wondering whether it might not be possible that the destinies had, at the very outset of her career of active beneficence, thrown her on the track of a discovery which was very near her heart, but had seemed far away from her hopes.

She was somewhat surprised when she saw Mr. Charlton. He was quite unlike what she had expected to see. This was a weakness on her part. She ought to have known that he would be unlike what she naturally expected to see. Everybody ought by this time to have mastered the physiological truth that the furious fanatic is certain to have the gentlest and sweetest manners ; that the uncompromising atheist is one whose whole appearance suggests only devotional fervour ; that the remorseless tyrant will have the complexion, the curls, and the hands of a girl ; and so

forth. Gabrielle expected, when she heard of Mr. Charlton's jealousy and his masterful love, to see a tall powerful man, with the approved or regulation tawny beard, and all the rest of the gigantic and tyrannical accessories; but having found this image naturally present itself, she ought to have known that the real man would be the very opposite of all this. So, of course, it proved. Robert Charlton was a small, slender, delicate-looking man, with long, thin fingers, such as an Asiatic worker in ivory might have; a dark, silky beard, the very silkiness of which suggested a wasted or over-refined physical constitution. He was sitting in the window engaged at some work upon a fan when Gabrielle entered, and was trying to catch all the sunlight that allowed itself to take the trouble of piercing its way into Bolingbroke Place. He seemed nervous to the point of personal distress when Gabrielle entered, and while he was presented to her by his wife. He gave Gabrielle a chair, however, with a certain graceful shyness, and then he stood up as if wondering what was to come next. Janet sat on a sofa, and seemed as if she were not expected to make any part of the social interview. This would have been a little

embarrassing to most visitors, but it did not affect Gabrielle in the least.

‘You are a wonderful worker, Mr. Charlton,’ she said, by way of a beginning; ‘I never saw such delicate manipulation as yours.’

The tone of her voice had a friendly ring about it. She seemed above all things sympathetic, to begin with.

‘I am glad you think so,’ Robert answered hesitatingly; ‘some people don’t understand the difficulty; I like to meet with one who does. It is the only thing I can do.’

‘Oh, now, there’s a story!’ Janet broke in, roused from her quiescence by his disparagement of himself—a thing she never could stand. ‘Indeed it is not true, Mrs. Vanthorpe, not a word; although he always goes on that way. He can do ever so many things; he could do anything he tried to, I am sure.’

Gabrielle turned to her in admiration; the little woman was looking so lovely in the fervour of her excitement.

‘I am sure he can do many things,’ Gabrielle said; ‘I see you have hands that ought to be able to do any-

thing in the way of artistic work, Mr. Charlton: hands as slender and delicate as a girl's; but strong, I dare say, as a girl's can't be.'

Charlton looked quickly at his hands, with an embarrassed but not at all a displeased air, and turned off attention by saying to his wife: 'Janet, I am sure this lady——'

'Mrs. Vanthorpe,' said Gabrielle, smiling.

'Mrs. Vanthorpe would like a cup of tea.'

Of course Gabrielle took care to say that she wished for a cup of tea above all things.

'You will excuse me, Mrs. Vanthorpe, I hope,' Robert went on, brightening up a little, 'if I seemed to forget your name. Of course, I knew well enough that it was for Mrs. Vanthorpe I was doing the work; but when I saw you I never thought you were the lady. You look too young to be a married lady. I thought you were Miss Vanthorpe, perhaps, or some other relation of the lady I was working for.'

'I am not so young as your wife, I think,' Gabrielle said; 'yet she is Mrs. Charlton.'

'Yes, that is quite true,' he answered; 'but then——' and he stopped and became embarrassed; for he knew



that the Mrs. Vanthorpe he was working for was a widow, and he was on the verge of saying something of the kind. His habitually pale face grew almost red at the thought of what he had so nearly uttered.

Gabrielle was for a moment a little embarrassed too, but she recovered herself in the resolve to set him at his ease.

‘Your wife is a beautiful woman—or girl, I ought to call her,’ she said. Janet was now in another room, bustling about in the preparation of the tea. ‘I think I never saw such lovely hair. You must be very proud of her.’

‘She is very beautiful,’ he said uneasily, and his face colouring once more. ‘She is too handsome for the kind of life we have to lead; I only hope she will not come to think so.’

‘Oh, she never will,’ said Gabrielle decisively. ‘She is not at all like that.’ Gabrielle spoke as confidently as if she had known Janet from her earliest infancy. ‘She does not seem to value her own beauty in the least, except as it pleases you. She appears to me to be a model wife, and I am sure you appreciate her, Mr. Charlton.’

‘I do appreciate her, I do,’ he said, as if in a tone of self-remonstrance; ‘I never like to find fault with her; but what kind of life is this for a woman so pretty as she? She has to go about here on errands for me, with my work and that, like any common servant. People may talk to her, and tell her she is too handsome for that sort of thing.’

‘She is much too sensible and much too fond of you to care for any such stuff. You must not think we women are all fools, Mr. Charlton.’

‘She should be a fool,’ he said, shaking his head, ‘if she thought the kind of life she leads here was a pleasant one, or fit for a woman like her. It is all very well to talk wisely on the matter; but there are people enough about to tell her so, and fill her mind with the thought.’

‘You want faith in her,’ Gabrielle said, almost angry with him for his perversity. ‘I don’t think you deserve so fond a wife, Mr. Charlton.’

‘Exactly,’ he answered, with an uneasy smile. ‘That is just what people will tell her, I dare say; that I am unworthy of her, and all that sort of thing.’

It does affect a woman's mind, however well-inclined she may be.'

Janet entered the room again, and cut short the conversation. She was handing Gabrielle a cup of tea, when a tap was heard at the door. Charlton looked towards his wife uneasily.

'It's Mr. Lefussis, dear,' Janet said. 'Mrs. Vanthorpe won't care to be disturbed.'

'Oh, he can't come in now,' Robert said. 'He is a man who lodges here; not a bad fellow, but a nuisance sometimes.'

Gabrielle fancied it must be the young man she had seen, and she was anxious for an opportunity of seeing him again.

'Don't send him away for me, please,' she said. 'I must not put you out of your usual ways. Mrs. Charlton promised me that you were not to be interfered with by me.'

Meanwhile the visitor who had tapped, and indeed tapped again without getting any answer while this discussion was going on, now gently opened the door, and was entering. When he saw a strange lady he began a sort of apology, but made no attempt to with-

draw. He was a tall lean man, some fifty years of age or thereabouts, wearing a shabby brown waterproof coat, which did not seem to cover any undercoat. He wore a stiff rigid old-fashioned stock of forgotten mould round his neck, and his shirt-collar suggested the days of the first Reform Bill. He had stiff beaver gloves, one of which was carried on, the other in, a hand. He was apparently the wreck of a gentleman; a hulk that had been much wasted and battered by adverse wind and weather. His thin hair and whiskers had that dusty grey on their edges which always suggests what Henry of Navarre called the wind of adversity blowing in the face. It showed curiously unlike the soft comfortable grey that speaks of life to the latest well enjoyed, and of dinners always sure to come at the right time.

‘Beg pardon, I am sure,’ the visitor said; ‘I hope I may come in just for a moment. I am not going to make any stay. I trust the lady will excuse me.’

‘Mr. Lefussis, madam,’ said Janet, doing the honours not very willingly. ‘A—a friend of Robert’s and mine.’

Mr. Lefussis made a grand bow, with a wave of the

arm that suggested the necessity of a three-cornered hat to render the effect of the gesture complete. Gabrielle acknowledged the salutation with external graciousness and internal wonder.

‘I thought you would like to know, Charlton,’ he said grandly. ‘I have been in town; in the Whitehall region, you know, F. O. in fact. I have had a long chat with Lord Bosworth, and I know all that’s going to be done. The German ambassador came in before I left, and Bosworth went over a good deal of it for him again; but not all, not quite all, of course.’

Some one ought to have said something, apparently, for Mr. Lefussis paused a moment. But Charlton sat with his eyes fixed on his own slender hands, and made no observation. Janet never pretended to have anything to say where lords and ambassadors and such-like personages were the subject of conversation; and Gabrielle did not feel it incumbent on her to do or say anything.

‘Things are looking very bad,’ Mr. Lefussis went on, when he found that he had as yet made no great impression; ‘I don’t well know, indeed, how they could by any possibility be much worse. If some step be not

taken to hold this government back from the mad course they are pursuing, we shall have all Europe in war in less than a month.'

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Janet, roused into attention by this appalling prospect. 'Can nothing be done, Mr. Lefussis?'

'Bosworth can do nothing,' he said decisively, and now addressing himself to Janet, as she alone appeared to have given proper attention to his story. 'He sees it all as plainly as I do; but he can do nothing. What could he do, you see? It isn't for him, Mrs. Charlton.'

'Oh, isn't it?' asked Janet, much perplexed; 'what a pity! Isn't there anybody who can do anything?'

'Yes,' he answered with dignity; 'I hope I can do something. I mean to try. Leven can do something; Taxal can do something, in his small way, of course, in his small way. We can hold meetings; I am going at once to Taxal and to Leven.'

The names gave Gabrielle a chance of coming into the conversation which she was rather glad of, for it was clear that Charlton would not enter into it, and

poor Janet was fast breaking down, and Mr. Lefussis would not go away.

‘Is “Leven” Major Leven, may I ask? Do you know Major Leven?’

‘Certainly, madam, certainly. I knew Leven in Demerara—let me see—when was it? In ’52 or ’55; I am really not quite certain which. You know Major Leven, madam?’

‘Major Leven is a very old friend of mine, and a very dear friend,’ Gabrielle answered, feeling her sentiments towards Mr. Lefussis grow warmer and deeper because of his intimacy with Major Leven.

‘Indeed!’ Lefussis eagerly said, and his eyes sparkled with unspeakable satisfaction. ‘Then I tell you what it is, Mrs. Charlton, my coming in to tell this to your husband is one of the most remarkable illustrations of the working of Providence in our human affairs that you can well imagine. I fancy Charlton is inclined to be a little of a sceptic now and then; but I hope even he won’t quite disregard the meaning of what I am going to say.’

Charlton looked up for a moment and nodded,

but said nothing. Gabrielle was now quite bewildered.

‘Look here,’ Lefussis went eagerly on; ‘I came in to see your husband, Mrs. Charlton, never dreaming that I was to have the happiness and the honour of an introduction to this lady; and even when I had that happiness and that honour, never dreaming that in her I was to see a valued friend of Major Leven. Is there nothing providential in this? Why, this lady has only to sit down at Charlton’s desk there and write me a letter of introduction to Major Leven, and it may be that Europe is saved from a war.’

‘I thought you said you knew this gentleman?’ Charlton interposed, looking suddenly up.

‘So I do, my dear fellow, so I do; at least, I did, you know, in Demerara, and other places too; but men forget each other. I haven’t been to dine with Leven this long time; and I never see him at the club now; I believe he has got married or something of the sort; but if this lady would just be kind enough to give me a line of introduction, it might perhaps be the means of rousing him to a deeper interest; and she might



hereafter claim to have had her share in saving England from a disgraceful war.'

Poor Janet interchanged glances of agony with her husband. This was too bad; Mrs. Vanthorpe seemed destined to be tormented by all their fellow-lodgers in turn. Now surely after this she would never come again.

'I should be delighted to bear my share in saving England from so great a calamity,' Gabrielle said gravely; 'but I fear I ought not to give any introduction to Major Leven just now. I have some good reason for not writing to him at present.'

'Now that is rather a pity,' the unabashed Lefussis said. 'You see, it would be such an advantage, and might do so much good; but of course if you can't, why there's an end. Might I even mention your name to Leven?—as a friend of my friends here, you know.'

'Oh, but please, Mr. Lefussis,' said Janet, in a low deprecating tone, 'don't make a mistake. Robert and I are not so presumptuous as to call ourselves friends of this lady.'

'That lady's face,' Lefussis decisively affirmed, 'pro-

claims her a friend of the whole human race. I ought to understand something of faces, and I can see that. I hope the lady will excuse me if I seem somewhat forward and pressing; it is in a great cause—a great cause; and there is no time to be lost. I'll go and talk to Fielding; Fielding sometimes has suggestions to give; and in any case I must see Leven and Taxal. Good evening, madam; good evening, Mrs. Charlton; good evening, Charlton. I thought you would like to know how things were going, and so I looked in.'

'Now, who is he?' Gabrielle asked in much curiosity after Mr. Lefussis had gone.

'He is a fool, madam,' said Charlton—'excuse me if I use strong language—an idiot who is made happy in his poverty and his failure by telling himself and everyone he can get to listen that he is hand and glove with every great person——.'

'Oh, Robert,' his wife interposed, 'I am sure poor Mr. Lefussis is very kind and friendly, and he means everything well. It was very wrong in him to make such a request of Mrs. Vanthorpe, and I shall tell him so; but he never meant to be rude, Mrs. Vanthorpe, he never did, indeed.'

‘He was not rude,’ Gabrielle said; ‘he was very polite, and I feel interested in him; but I am anxious to know whether he deceives himself, or is trying to deceive other people?’

‘He deceives himself,’ Charlton said; ‘he is not conscious of contradicting himself, or making up stories, or being an idiot. Whatever he likes to believe, he imagines; and he is happy for the time. I believe he is a gentleman, and I believe he had prospects once; and now he has come to live in this place and to have Janet and me for friends.’

‘Is he poor?’ asked Gabrielle.

‘Poor as a church mouse,’ Charlton answered. ‘In fact, I don’t know what he lives on; Janet and I are rich in comparison. But I presume he thinks he patronises us because we never belonged to the class that has thrown him off.’

‘I should like to do something for him, if I could,’ Gabrielle said quietly.

‘You may do anything you like for him, madam,’ Charlton said, with an angry flush crossing his face, but only seeming to touch its surface as one sometimes sees a sunset ray fall on a little frozen pool. ‘You may do

anything you like for him, but I beg you will not think of doing anything for me. I want nothing ; Janet and I want nothing from anybody. I am not a gentleman, she is not a lady ; I am ready to work for ladies and gentlemen, but I don't want patronage, and I don't want help.' He did not look at Gabrielle all the time, but kept uneasily moving up and down the room and rubbing his hands.

'Oh, Robert, Robert,' his wife entreated ; 'how can you go on in such a way ? I am sure Mrs. Vanthorpe never meant——'

Gabrielle was neither alarmed nor offended. She took this outbreak with perfect composure ; indeed, it interested her far more than ordinary conversation would have done.

'Your husband is quite right, child,' she said quietly to Janet. 'I like him the better for his independence. But when I think of intruding my patronage it will be quite time, Mr. Charlton, to resent it, will it not ? I was only thinking, when I spoke of serving your friend here, whether I might really venture to give him a letter to Major Leven—my doubt was on family reasons only. I am glad to know your wife,

and I like her very much. I shall be glad to know you if you will allow me.'

Charlton seemed a little ashamed of his outburst, and Gabrielle turned the conversation presently on books and on art, of which she found that Charlton knew a good deal in the scrappy dogmatic way common to 'self-educated' persons, as the phrase is. He had many fresh ideas, and she drew him artfully into talk until he became much delighted with himself and with her, and quite eloquent in the end. Gabrielle did not think she could safely approach the question of Janet's beauty and his jealous humours that time. She would come again, she thought, and accomplish that part of her mission; the first thing was to win Charlton's confidence in herself. That she did her best to accomplish at once. So far did she get, that before she had left he promised to come with his wife to see Gabrielle at her house. Gabrielle was as proud of having conquered thus far, and tamed his fierce independence, as if she were a commander who had succeeded in capturing some strong position at the beginning of a battle. Her goodness and her good opinion of her own skill were gratified alike.

Gabrielle was about to go. She had ordered her little carriage to come for her, and it had now been some time waiting. She had lingered a good deal, not altogether without a hope that the young man she had seen at the door might come in, and that she might have an opportunity of seeing what he was like. She had made up her mind that there was something mysterious about this young man, and about the wonder which he had expressed when he heard her name.

‘What is the name of your other fellow-lodger?’ she asked carelessly. ‘The young man who was at the door when you came down to-day, Mrs. Charlton—the young man who let me in?’

‘Was *he* there?’ Charlton asked of his wife. ‘You didn’t tell me that.’

‘He opened the door for me very politely,’ said Gabrielle. ‘Mrs. Charlton was not there just then.’

‘His name is Fielding,’ Robert said. ‘I don’t know very well who he is; he thinks a good deal of himself, I fancy; I wish he would mind his own affairs a little more. He seems a clever sort of fellow, but rather eccentric.’

Gabrielle was gratified to hear that he was eccentric. So far as that went, it fitted in with the little speculation in which she had already been indulging her active fancy.

She would not hear of Robert Charlton's coming to show her downstairs; his time was far too valuable, she said, to be wasted in ceremonial. Mrs. Charlton would light her down, and she would not have anyone else. She went down the dark stairs with Janet, smiling and nodding a good-bye to Robert as she looked back. Then she leaned upon Janet's arm in the friendliest fashion, and told her in a whisper that she hoped to accomplish all for her yet in bringing her husband to reason; and she put Janet into a very bewilderment of pride and delight. Just as they came to the bottom of the stairs a door on the left opened, and Mr. Lefussis and Fielding came out together. Gabrielle graciously bowed to both. Lefussis at once insisted on opening her carriage-door for her, which he did with the air of a man who still believes that in carriages sit his natural companions. Fielding remained behind and talked to Janet.

Gabrielle somewhat relaxed towards Lefussis.

‘Perhaps I might be able to do something in the way of introducing you to Major Leven,’ she said. ‘If you were to call on me, Mr. Lefussis, the day after to-morrow, perhaps I might have thought of some way ; and I should like to bear my part in saving England from destruction.’

‘What part more worthy of a noble-hearted English lady?’ the delighted Lefussis said, taking her words quite seriously. ‘I shall esteem it the highest honour to be allowed to wait upon you after to-morrow or any day.’

Gabrielle gave him her address, and left him in a condition of exalted happiness. Surely never woman had in a few minutes—an hour or so—made more admirers with honester intention. Janet and Lefussis both remained a moment or two on the door-step to sound her praises ; both agreed that so charming, so delightful, so kind, so unaffected, so altogether noble a young woman, was never seen before. Poor Lefussis saw himself once more a welcome visitor in those West-end drawing-rooms from which he had for some little time been sadly absent. Janet saw a peaceful happy home opening up for her as the result of this almost



angelic visitation. As for Mr. Fielding, he agreed in all that was said about Gabrielle's beauty and grace of appearance ; but he entered a protest as regarded her manners, which he still professed to consider rude. His two companions, however, raised indignant protest, and he gave up the contest, and went back to his room, wondering much within himself as to who the young and handsome woman could be who bore the name of Mrs. Vanthorpe.

‘ Robert, dear, is she not delightful ? ’ Janet asked, as she burst in upon her husband.

He raised his head from some piece of work he seemed to be bending over earnestly, but he did not look at Janet.

‘ Who is delightful, Janet ? ’

‘ Oh, Mrs. Vanthorpe, of course. Is she not charming ? ’

‘ She is charming,’ Robert slowly said, and he went on with his work. Janet was disappointed. *He* did not seem nearly so much gladdened by Gabrielle's visit as Janet was, or as she had expected that he would be.

‘ So kind she is,’ Janet said. ‘ We are to spend an evening with her, Robert ; when shall we go ? ’

‘I don’t know; perhaps I shall not go at all.’

‘But that would be so very unkind, and such a bad return for her kindness, Robert! And she likes to talk to you about books and pictures and things.’

‘She can’t care to talk to a man like me,’ he said. ‘She puts it on, out of kindness; but she can’t really care. She knows too many people who are educated and gentlemen; not fellows like me.’

‘Oh, but she does care, I know; I could see by her manner. You would not understand her manner so well as I could, Robert. I know she was pleased to talk to you.’

‘I have read of such women,’ Robert said; ‘I never talked with one before—I mean, except in the way of this wretched business. I suppose they are common enough in that class.’

‘What sort of women, Robert?’

‘Women who can talk of things that rational men care to hear about.’

Janet did not resent this, and indeed did not understand it in any sense disparaging to herself. She always assumed that a poor man’s wife was not supposed to know anything about books, and that her

husband would no more complain of her on that account than because she had not brought him a large fortune.

‘She is very rich,’ Janet said, returning to her favourite topic. ‘My aunt says that her husband left her ever so much money.’

‘I shall never leave you any money,’ Charlton said.

‘You gave me your love, Robert, and all your cleverness, dear.’

‘I couldn’t endow you with that,’ he said sharply, and he turned doggedly to his work.

Janet did not quite understand this sarcasm, but she knew that something was wrong with Robert. She saw that, for some reason or other, the visit she had looked forward to with so much hope, and which had given her such delight, had not yet added to her husband’s stock of happiness. Robert did not talk any more. He looked up once or twice, and glanced around the room, and at Janet. The room showed very mean and pitiful in his eyes; his work seemed mechanical and ignoble; and Janet’s hair looked less glorious than usual.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE ROLLING STONE AND THE MILLSTONE.

ROBERT CHARLTON was a man just clever enough to be bitterly discontented, and loving enough to be morbidly jealous. He had had no school education. He had somehow got it into his head that he must have come of a high family, and that anyhow fate had done him a personal wrong in not making him a gentleman. His way of educating himself had made him dogmatic, and had allowed him to grow into the conviction that he had genius far above his sphere or his chances. The very work which he could do so well, and which was in its own way strictly artistic, he despised even while he was vain of his success in it. He was short of stature and feeble; and he convinced himself that only handsome men were ever really loved by women. He made himself miserable in his love-making days when Janet

would not marry him at once, because he persuaded himself that if he had only been tall, handsome, or a gentleman, she would have taken him without delay ; and now that he was married he made himself miserable with the idea that his wife's head might be turned by the admiration of anybody who was tall, or rich, or handsome ; not to say by anyone—and, alas ! he knew how many such there were !—who was tall, handsome, and of high social position all at once. He girded at men or women of position if he supposed they were presuming to patronise him ; and he raged at them in silence when they seemed to take no notice of him. The countesses and other fine ladies of whom Mrs. Bramble had spoken filled him with wrath when they came and sat condescendingly by him in his room and watched his work. He knew that their familiarity was only the cruellest evidence of the fathomless gulf they supposed to exist between him and them. They never spoke to him on any subject that was not in some way connected with his craft. It was with perfect truth he had said that Gabrielle was the only lady with whom he had ever really talked. She was not, good sooth, of the countess or duchess class ; but he

saw that she was a lady who might have held herself at a wide distance from him, and therefore, when she sate and talked with him in such an unaffected and friendly way, he felt an entirely new sensation of gratified vanity and stimulated intelligence stirring within him. It pleased him to say to his wife that Mrs. Vanthorpe did not care to talk to him, and to draw forth Janet's simple earnest assurance of her conviction that Mrs. Vanthorpe felt great delight in his conversation.

Janet had gone to bed early, and her husband remained in their sitting-room working. Presently he heard the street-door open to some late lodger, and after a few moments he heard a familiar step coming up the stairs towards his room. He knew that it was Fielding's step, and at the moment he was not glad of the visit. His feelings towards Fielding were a curious compound of liking and dislike, of sympathy and distrust. In the first place, he was inclined to dislike Fielding because the latter was tall and good-looking. On the other hand, Fielding seemed, like himself, to be poor, and to be discontented with the world. The sweet and sacred bond of poor devilship,

therefore, ought to have held them together; and this was a bond which, to do him justice, Charlton was inclined to recognise. What particular occupation Fielding followed he had never been quite able to make out, but in that house men did not trouble themselves much about each other's occupations.

The step came to his door, the knock which he had expected followed, and Fielding came in.

'Hard at work, as usual,' Fielding said. 'I say, Charlton, what a fagging fellow you are! You are always slaving. You ought to make a fortune.'

'Yes, I am very likely to make a fortune!' Charlton grimly said. 'People in this old building often make fortunes, don't they? What an opulent fellow Lefussis is, for example.'

Charlton motioned to the effect that there was a chair at Fielding's service. Fielding accepted the invitation, somewhat careless though it was, and sat down.

'Lefussis is off his head,' he said; 'he has been invited by that pretty woman who was here this evening to call upon her. He fully believes he is going into the gilded saloons again.'

‘He had better get a new coat, I would suggest,’ said Charlton, made angry by the idea of any civility being shown to Lefussis which might tend to diminish the value of the kindness offered to himself.

‘So he said himself to me,’ Fielding answered. ‘He isn’t ashamed of being poor. That’s one reason why I like dear old Lefussis. He is a good deal of an idiot, and a dash of a madman, but he continues to be a gentleman all the same.’

Charlton looked angry. He was always suspecting that people were implying that he was not a gentleman.

‘By the way,’ Fielding asked, ‘who is that woman? She is very handsome, although she is so pale. I am rather curious about her.’

‘She is a Mrs. Vanthorpe.’

‘Thank you. Yes, she told me that much herself. But I want to know who the Mrs. Vanthorpe is. I should have expected an elderly Mrs. Vanthorpe; but I didn’t think of a girl looking as young as Janet there.’

‘As—Janet?’

‘Yes; as Janet. Janet is your wife’s name, isn’t



it? As Mrs. Robert Charlton, 'I ought to have said, no doubt, to be properly formal, and not to disturb the mind of a jealous old blockhead like yourself—or young blockhead, if you insist on it; young, that is, in years, but old in absurdity.'

'We were talking about Mrs. Vanthorpe,' Charlton said.

'So we were. Your words, Charlton, recall me to myself, as they used to say in the Surrey tragedies. Well, I am curious to know something about this pretty Mrs. Vanthorpe. Is she a widow?'

'She is.'

'That is very strange. I can't make it out.'

'What? that there should be a young widow?'

'No, but about this young widow. You see, Charlton, Vanthorpe is not a very common name; it isn't even as common as Charlton——'

'Or Fielding,' interjected the other, irritated by the faintest suggestion of disparagement to his name or himself.

'Or Fielding, as you say. Well, I knew a Vanthorpe in the States; I knew him in St. Louis and also in New Orleans.'

‘I didn’t know you had been in America.’

‘Didn’t you? did I never tell you? Well, that shows how discreet a person I am, and don’t bore people with my travels. Of all things on earth, nothing bores one like another fellow’s travels. I have been in all sorts of places in my time. I knew this Vanthorpe, and we were thrown a good deal together. We rather took to one another, in fact, we two Britishers. He interested me. I don’t say that he was the sort of man Dean Stanley or Dr. Newman would have got on with, but I liked him.’

‘Was he anything to this Mrs. Vanthorpe?’

‘That is just the thing I should like to know. He never spoke of any Mrs. Vanthorpe but his mother. I presume he had not been the very best of sons; he talked about his mother in a sort of way that made me think so.’

‘What became of him since?’

‘Ah, yes; just so, exactly; what did? Anyhow, his story wouldn’t interest you, Charlton, my good fellow, and so I’ll use the same discretion you say I displayed with regard to my travels. By the way, are you fond of travelling?’

‘I never travel anywhere. How could I get time and money to travel? I never was out of England in my life. I have been always working in this sort of way, and I dare say I always shall be. A man who has a wife to keep can’t travel.’

‘There you go—grumbling again! You married fellows really ought to remember that you can’t have everything in life. You can’t have the charming wife, the life-companion, the angel in the house and all that, and have the freedom of a travelling tinker besides. You oughtn’t to envy us poor bachelors the desolate freedom of the wild ass—isn’t that somebody’s phrase? You would not exchange Janet—I mean, of course, Mrs. Robert Charlton—for the independence of the freest bachelor Red Indian that ever sold beads and nuts at the Cheyenne railway station.’

‘Then you don’t know any more about this man Vanthorpe—the man in A—’

‘Man in the South—the man in the Southern States; and he has been in my fancy, many a time. I don’t know much about him now, Charlton, but it doesn’t interest you, and I am not going to

tell it. But I am greatly interested in the Mrs. Vanthorpe I saw to-day, and I wish you would tell me something about her.'

'There's nothing to tell. My wife's aunt is a servant, as I dare say she has confessed to you and everybody she knows long before this; simply a servant. She is a servant in Mrs. Vanthorpe's house, and Mrs. Vanthorpe is kind enough to take an interest in the husband of her servant's niece, and gives him jobs of work to do; and that's how she comes to be here. I know nothing else about her, and I don't ask questions. I know my place, as all the servants say. If one's wife has relations in service, what's the use of affecting to be better than one's class?'

'What a delightful creature you are, Charlton—so genial and full of gratitude and of the milk of human kindness! If ever I get up a great social revolution I shall know where to look for someone to chop off the heads of the bloated aristocrats for me. You have the regulation look of the Caliban-Robespierre-Desmou-lins—that sort of thing. I should think, now, you could easily be got to take quite a pleasure in fixing that pretty young woman's neck in the guillotine just

because she was kind to your wife and wants to be a lady-patroness to you.'

'She does not propose to be a lady-patroness to me. I gave her my mind pretty clearly on that subject.'

'Did you really? What a nice, polite, refined creature she must have thought you!'

'I don't care; she shan't patronise me.'

'Shan't she? Well, I don't mind, I'm sure. I only wish she would patronise me. We should see which would grow tired first, she or I.'

'I don't believe it,' said Charlton angrily. 'I do not believe you would endure it. At least, I don't know; some fellows have no—Anyhow, I am not to be patronised.'

'Some fellows have no spirit, you were going to say. All right; I shouldn't have any spirit of that kind where so charming a woman as that was concerned. If she looked at me in a particular sort of way, I would lie down at her feet. "Oh, sweet, divine creature, come and trample on me," that would be my word. I am quite serious, Charlton, you precocious young-old savage. I should say to her, "Queen of my soul, have the

gracious goodness to imprint the heels of your boots on this manly forehead.”’

‘Why don’t you make a pretext of asking her whether she is any connection of this Vanthorpe you knew?’

‘No; I shall not do that,’ said Fielding gravely. There was a moment’s silence.

‘Won’t you have something to drink?’ asked Charlton, seeing that his visitor was not making any movement as if to go away.. ‘Some brandy and water?’

‘Beg your pardon—you were saying—something to drink? No. But that reminds me of what I came for. You just come down to my room. I have got some wonderful burgundy; that’s why I came up for you. Come with me, and we’ll have some, or if you don’t like to come down, I’ll bring a bottle up. But I think we should be better below—we shouldn’t spoil your wife’s little room with our smoke.’

Janet did not like the smell of smoke, to be sure, but Charlton was on the point of refusing Fielding’s invitation coldly for all that. He did not like hearing of his wife’s ‘little room.’ It was not a very big room,

truly ; but what manner of man was Fielding to give himself airs and talk patronisingly about people's little rooms ? His own room was not by any means a very spacious apartment ; and a man who was still a bachelor could afford to put on the ways of easy comfort at small expense. Then, Fielding was a still younger man than Charlton, and he therefore might be expected to be a little more respectful.

‘I see you don't want to come down,’ said the irrepressibly good-natured Fielding. ‘All right ; I'll bring you up a bottle, and we'll be very comfortable here. We'll open the windows ; or, I say, we'll not smoke ? It does not matter for once, and we ought to think of Janet—I mean, of Mrs. Robert Charlton.’ In a moment Charlton came to the conclusion that Fielding did not want him to go down, and also that he was patronising Janet.

‘Oh no, let us go down,’ he said. ‘We shall, as you say, be more comfortable in your large apartment than in the little room where Janet and I have to live.’

Fielding looked at him and laughed.

‘What a delightful old surly bear you are, Charlton ! You are quite a study, I declare. You are a modern

copy of the what's-his-name in Terence; the self-tormenting fellow, you know.'

Charlton made no reply. Indeed, he was used to compliments of this kind; and although he deserved them, he could not keep from acting in a way to deserve them. They went down together.

Fielding's room was not a very large one certainly, and its fittings were not luxurious; they were quite in keeping with the general conditions of the place. A round table in the middle covered with a dark red cloth, a few chairs with horsehair cushions, a little sofa of the same description; a mirror in a gilt frame over the chimney-piece, which if it had been a magic mirror could not have reflected more clearly the story of a poorer-class London lodging-house; an engraving of her Majesty the Queen, and one or two coloured pictures from an illustrated paper. These were the utensils and the ornaments of the room. But it did not escape the observation of Robert Charlton that there were some smaller properties of a very different kind. There was, for example, a heavy lamp of antique shape, and which Charlton was certain had cost money, and had never been bought by any lodging-house keeper. There were



coats and rugs of an expensive kind lying around ; there was an ebony writing-desk such as one does not buy in a cheap furniture shop ; and in one of the compartments of the desk which happened to be open there was lying a diamond ring which sparkled in the very eyes of Charlton as he entered the room. Charlton had keen sight, and immense observation for costly and beautiful things. He might almost be said to have exchanged glances with the diamond, so quickly did his eye flash on it as it flashed. Fielding may have observed the look, for he too glanced at the desk.

‘ You must make a lot of money sometimes or somehow,’ Charlton said. ‘ But you will be robbed some night, if you leave such things lying about.’

‘ Men come down in the world sometimes, don’t they, Charlton ? You have come down yourself, I am inclined to think ; but I don’t ask questions.’

This, whether said purposely or not, was touching Charlton at his weakest point. Of all things it most delighted him to have it supposed that he had come down to his present position from some place in society. He became more friendly to his companion at once. Moreover, he was sympathetic enough to understand

that a man who had once had money and had mixed in good company would like, through whatever difficulties, to keep with him some relics of the departed brighter days. So much was he softened towards Fielding, that he could not help admitting to himself that his host must have looked a handsome young fellow in the season when the diamond ring and the other costly things were appropriate to his every-day life. The burgundy proved to be delicious, and Charlton had the most of it. He observed that Fielding enjoyed it and seemed to appreciate it, what he did drink of it; but he certainly drank very little. The thin pale face of Robert Charlton began to colour and glow a little with the genial effect.

They talked of many things, and argued and disputed not a little. Charlton observed that Fielding often brought the talk back to Mrs. Vanthorpe. Charlton, however, had little to disclose on that subject, for he knew very little himself. As they were separating, Robert's quick eye fell upon the back of an old letter which Fielding threw down after having torn a part of the envelope to light his cigar. He observed that it was addressed to '—Fielding, Esq., Langham Hotel.'

‘So you were once living at the Langham Hotel? Pretty expensive place, isn’t it?’

‘Stayed there after I came back from America last,’ Fielding said coolly. ‘A man has money sometimes, Charlton, and some of us are never happy when we have it unless we find some way of spending it. Yes, you can spend money at the Langham if you like; but I don’t know that it is a particularly expensive place in the ordinary way. Many American fellows go there; I went with an American fellow.’

‘I just remember something, by the way,’ Charlton said suddenly. ‘You have a good many books, Fielding. I wonder, have you anything among them that would throw a light on something I want to know about just now? I have got a fan to repair, and there must be some new colouring put to it. It’s a fan with little pictures of famous places—the Parthenon at Athens, Alhambra, and that monument—the Taj Mahal, isn’t it?—in India. I want to get a right notion of the general colours, you know; not to do as a man did who gave a general tone of grey to the Coliseum and of red to the leaning tower of Pisa.’

‘I have not any books,’ Fielding said, after a mo-

ment's thought ; 'but if you show me the thing, I dare say I can tell you all you want to know. I've seen all these places, and I think I can remember perfectly well what they were like—as to shades and colour, and all that.'

'You have seen all these places ?' Charlton asked, in undisguised wonder.

'Yes, I told you I had been in some places,' Fielding answered carelessly. 'I have been a sort of rolling-stone in my time ; and you see I haven't gathered much moss.'

'I have been a mill-stone fastened here and grinding here all day ; I don't know that I have got much by that.'

'You might make quite an instructive fable of that, Charlton. What the mill-stone said to the rolling-stone.

A rolling-stone once being rebuked by a mill-stone ;—you see the idea ?'

Then the mill-stone and the rolling-stone were separated for the night.

Next day Charlton said to his wife : 'I don't know what to make of that fellow Fielding, Janet. I wish

you would avoid making much acquaintance with him.

‘I hardly ever see him, Robert, unless when he comes in to see you. Why don’t you know what to make of him?’

‘He has been everywhere, travelled all over the world almost, Greece, Spain, America, India, every place. He has all the ways of a man who spends money; he has diamonds, and he gave me burgundy last night that must have cost a big price. And what is he? what does he do for a living?’

Janet suggested that perhaps he was in the City.

‘Stuff, Janet! sometimes he doesn’t go out for three days together. I thought he might be a literary man, but there’s no one of that name in the field that I ever heard. He isn’t a painter, for he never paints. He isn’t a newspaper writer, for he doesn’t often go out at nights.’

Janet was going to say that he was a very nice gentlemanly man anyhow; but she reflected in time on the inexpediency of indulging in praise of any male creature. She had begun her sentence, however, and

she had to finish it; so she suggested that possibly he might be a detective.

‘A detective! You are a fool, Janet. No; he isn’t a detective, you may take your oath of that. If I have any suspicions at all, they point a very different way.’

## CHAPTER VI.

## GABRIELLE'S CLIENTS.

IF mental activity constitute the nearest approach to happiness in mortals, as the philosophic prose-poet maintains, then Gabrielle Vanthorpe's condition just now ought to have been happy. Her mind was much occupied with more or less advanced and active projects for the benefit of her fellow-creatures. She was determined to win again the affection of Mrs. Leven by finding out her lost son and restoring him to her arms; and strange as the idea may seem, she had all but persuaded herself that the young man she had seen in Bolingbroke Place could put her on the track of the lost one. If Gabrielle had ventured to confess boldly to herself all that her fancy would fain have persuaded her to be true, she would have said that she imagined the young man Fielding himself to be the vanished

prodigal. But even if this should not be so—and she did not dare to tell herself too plainly that it actually was so—it seemed certain to her that the young man must know something of the matter. Else why did he seem so much surprised to hear the name of Vanthorpe? It was an uncommon name; but there was nothing in its sound to amaze anyone, unless he had some particular associations connected with it. At all events, one of her schemes had to do with Fielding and Bolingbroke Place. Another of her schemes had to do with Bolingbroke Place as well, but it concerned the happiness of Robert and Janet Charlton. She proposed to make the one wise and content, and the other happy.

She had other projects, too, and other people to protect. Gabrielle had ventured on writing a short letter to Walter Taxal, asking him to come and see her some day, and telling him she had one or two favours to ask of him. She had long admired his singular good nature, his willingness to serve anyone, and his restless energy, which was always occupying itself in new fields. She knew that he was at once amateur politician and amateur musician, and she had just now occasion to appeal to his kindness and his help in each capacity.



She thought he ought to be able and willing to lend a hand to Lefussis in his important project for saving England. Gabrielle did not exactly believe that the salvation of the country really depended on Mr. Lefussis, or even on Mr. Lefussis and Walter Manny Taxal combined. But still she thought that if danger of any kind were impending, it might be as well not to neglect any chance of averting it. Even the most elementary reading of Roman history warned her against supposing that only wise and noble birds can do anything to save the Capitol.

That was one object she had in view in sending for Taxal. Another was the cause of a girl who was believed by her friends to have marvellous musical and dramatic talent, and who only wanted a chance to throw Europe into ecstasies and make a fortune for herself. This young lady lived with her brother, much older than herself, and the brother had been Albert Vanthorpe's fencing-master years ago. When Gabrielle settled in Albert's house, he sought her out and made his appeal to her; and Gabrielle, without giving the matter ten minutes' consideration, had taken up the cause of the sister, and was prepared to champion her musical

capacity against, if needs were, the Royal Academy of Music and a whole sceptical world. Now she thought Walter Taxal would be the very man to help this girl into a position which would enable her to help herself. Another woman in Gabrielle's place would have hesitated about writing to Taxal, for there had been at one time a vague idea that if Albert were not there Taxal might have become an admirer of hers. But Gabrielle never thought of such a thing now, and perhaps in any case would not have allowed any such mere conjecture to interfere between her and the chance of getting Walter Taxal to do good to himself and others by helping his fellow-creatures. 'There is somebody wanting to be helped, and here is somebody capable of giving the help'—it was after this fashion that Gabrielle would have reasoned—'What ought anyone to do who can do it but try to bring these two together?' She would rather have written to Major Leven than to Mr. Taxal, so far as Lefussis and the redemption of England were concerned; but she could not write to Major Leven while Major Leven's wife would not speak to her; and in any case Major Leven could neither appreciate nor assist her young musical prodigy.

The day when Gabrielle was expecting the visit from Mr. Lefussis she received a card from Walter Taxal. She was sitting alone in the melancholy room that we may call her sanctuary; but she would not receive a visitor there. She hastened to her drawing-room, and there saw two figures, not one. When she entered, one of the two ran towards her, and caught her in his arms and kissed her. When she saw who it was, she returned his kisses; and the tears were in her eyes and in his. Walter Taxal stood modestly in the background.

‘How kind of you—oh, how kind of you to come and see me,’ Gabrielle said. ‘I did not like to write to you.’

‘My dear, I was always fond of you since I knew you,’ Major Leven said, recovering his voice as well as he could. ‘I always knew you for a sweet good girl. You have a friend in me, no matter what anybody may say. When Taxal told me that he was coming to see you, I said to myself, “I may come too, I may come too; Gabrielle must be changed indeed if she won’t receive me, and take my visit as it is meant, you know.” I can’t answer for others, Gabrielle, but I can answer for

myself; and I am your friend, my dear, always your true friend.'

'How is Mrs. Leven?' Gabrielle asked timidly.

'Does she ever speak of me? Oh, how I loved her.'

'We have spoken of you, but not much, Gabrielle; not much as yet. It would not be well, perhaps; you ladies have odd ways—not all of you, I don't mean—but some of you. But she'll come round. I have been talking to her about her son—the other son, you know—I hope he is alive.'

'I am sure he is alive,' said Gabrielle suddenly, and then checked herself.

'But here is Taxal,' Major Leven said; 'and I know you want to talk to him about something. I just came round with him. I didn't mention to Mrs. Leven that I was coming, you know; it would not be of any use rousing premature feeling——'

Gabrielle smiled with tear-sparkling eyes, and held out her hand again to Leven in token of understanding and friendship. The kindly and chivalrous Leven pressed it to his lips.

'We will trust to time,' said Gabrielle bravely.

'She will love me again, Major Leven.'

‘She will; she can’t help it, Leven declared energetically. ‘Well, I am truly happy to have seen you—’

‘No, you must not go yet,’ Gabrielle interposed. ‘I want you too, as well as Mr. Taxal. Do, Mr. Taxal, excuse us if we have been rudely inattentive. Major Leven and I are such old friends; and we have not seen each other this long time, and so many things have happened since we met last.’

Walter Taxal hastened to assure her that he was not in the least put out by the fact that he had been overlooked for a moment. Truth to say, he did not seem to harbour any deep resentment. Then Gabrielle began to unfold her projects; first, as regarded Mr. Lefussis. There was somewhat of a twinkle in Taxal’s eyes when the name was mentioned.

‘Surely we know something of Lefussis, Leven?’ he said, turning to his friend. ‘The man, isn’t he, who proposes amendments at all the Conservative working men’s meetings, and is invariably hustled out for his pains? I fancy he is not a very bad sort of fellow; a little out of it, perhaps, in the head. But how you came to know him, Mrs. Vanthorpe, I cannot imagine.’

‘What does he want us to do for him, Gabrielle?’ Major Leven asked. ‘Tell him I’ll do anything you ask me; only, my dear, I think I wouldn’t be getting all sorts of odd people round me. You don’t understand; you will be found believing everything everybody tells you. Now, I don’t say a word against this poor Lefussis; I dare say he is a very honest fellow; but you must be cautious; you don’t know anything of the world.’

‘Listen to him,’ Gabrielle said, ‘to him who believes every tale of grievance everyone tells him in the streets, and who has to leave his purse at home if he is not to get rid of all that is in it before he comes half-way to the end of a walk! He would bid me be cautious and careful and knowing about the world, and all the rest of it.’

‘Well, well! good advice, you know, is good advice, even though one isn’t always wise oneself. You must be prudent, Gabrielle, and not set people talking, not give them a handle, and all that. If Taxal and I ever make fools of ourselves, why it doesn’t much matter. But tell poor Lefussis I’ll do anything I can. Let him come and see me; he’ll see Taxal to-day; I can’t wait.

Gabrielle could not well explain to them what Lefussis proposed to do, except generally to save England. Major Leven shook his head gravely, and expressed his fear, in all seriousness, that that was past praying for. But he declared that he was not for openly proclaiming despair, and that he would work with Lefussis or anyone else in a good cause. Then, as he had no end of other engagements, and as Mr. Taxal wanted to talk over some of them with him, it was arranged that Taxal should accompany him on some of his errands, and come back a little later in the day to see Lefussis and to hear the young aspirant for the crown of lyric song. It may be remarked that Taxal, for all his stock of native enthusiasm, grew grave when he heard of the new singer, and thought hers a far more difficult undertaking than that of Mr. Lefussis.

The time seemed long and slow to Gabrielle when Leven and Taxal were gone, and she was left alone. She did not like now to be left alone. In her girlish days she had delighted in occasional solitude, but now loneliness oppressed her. It set her thinking of the youth who had loved her, and tormenting herself with doubts as to whether she had been to him all that she

might have been. It allowed her to go over and over again, to no purpose, the story of her long companionship with Mrs. Leven, and its harsh and sudden severance ; and again she tortured herself by trying to make up her mind as to whether she was to blame, and whether there was anything that she ought to have done in time and had not done. Her schemes of active benevolence, too, seemed to grow chill and bodiless when she was long alone. Her eager temperament faded and withered in enforced inactivity. She was glad when her maid came to tell of the arrival of the aspiring singer, and the singer's still more aspiring brother.

Professor Elvin—he was professor of the art of arms—entered the room with a long gliding step forward, and then a short step, and then a long gliding step again. He was a man of forty, with hair and beard already turned grey. He was straight and almost as lithe as one of his own fencing foils ; and he was always in some attitude that now suggested soldier, and now actor, and now again dancing-master. His beard and moustache were neatly trimmed ; the beard into a little peak, the moustache into points. He was dressed in a dark blue single-breasted frock coat, fawn-coloured



trowsers, and wore lavender gloves, glossy and glazed with newness. Miss Elvin was a sallow girl, who looked as if she had stepped out of a mediæval painting—her chin was so pointed, her mouth was so large, her lips were so thin, her eyes were so long and mournful, her drapery was so darksome in its green. She had a way of first lowering and then suddenly raising her eyes, which discomposed the stranger. She accepted Gabrielle's genial welcome with a proud humility, like one who, conscious of supreme merit, leaves it to whomso it concerns to take the responsibility of making it known to the world.

‘Yours is a noble ambition,’ Gabrielle said enthusiastically, meaning what she said.

‘We have had enemies,’ Professor Elvin said, with a grand wave of the right arm. ‘We have had many enemies. You will not be surprised to hear that, Mrs. Vanthorpe. My sister’s voice and her talents must, of course, make enemies for her.’

‘I suppose so; I have no doubt,’ Gabrielle exclaimed, with sparkling eyes. ‘It is always so, I am afraid; the world is always like that. But I am not sorry to hear it in your case, Mr. Elvin; I should not

have much faith in anyone who did not make enemies. Such enmity is only a tribute to your sister's talents.'

'Just so ; exactly so ; you are quite right, madam ; so we feel it, I assure you. The more I hear of plots and conspiracies against this dear girl, the more I feel encouraged—the more I encourage her. I always say to her, "You ought to be proud of this, Gertrude—proud of it, my sister ; it proves that they fear you as a rival." And they do fear her, Mrs. Vanthorpe ; and they shall have cause to fear still more when she once begins to make her way.'

'I have had some enemies, undoubtedly,' the young aspirant said, with eyes modestly downcast, and speaking in the restrained tone of one who could tell startling things if she did but wish. 'You would hardly believe some of the things we have known of—known as a certainty—you would hardly believe them if you did not yourself know them. I don't see why they should fear. The lyric stage is surely wide enough for all of us.'

'They have conspired against her, madam ; hatched plots and conspiracies to keep her off the boards of the Opera. The most popular singers of the day are in the

plot—I won't call them the greatest; they are not great, any of them—and they have made the managers promise that she shall never have a chance. Why, I am in a position to prove that——' (he named a famous queen of song) 'actually told the manager that she would never sing for him again if he as much as gave Gertrude a trial.'

'But that is unspeakably mean and pitiful,' said Gabrielle; 'I cannot imagine anything more ignoble. Oh, it is too shameful.'

Miss Elvin tossed her head and shrugged her shoulders, as if to signify that really that was nothing, if Gabrielle knew but all.

'When self-conceit once gets possession of the mind,' the Professor loftily said, 'there is no measuring the depths of folly and meanness to which it will carry its victims.'

'That is only too true,' Gabrielle answered, so earnestly that Miss Elvin looked sharply up at her, as if suspecting for a moment that the remark had in it something of present application. But Gabrielle spoke simply and in perfect good faith; marvelling at the injustice and selfishness of a great singer, who, herself

fed with success and fame, could endeavour to keep this poor young aspirant from even having a fair chance of showing what she could do.

‘What I don’t quite see,’ said Gabrielle meditatively, ‘is how we are to battle against this conspiracy. Don’t think I would have you fail in courage, Miss Elvin, or that I would fail in courage myself. Only, if all these great singers are in a band against us’ — Gabrielle had already made Miss Elvin’s cause her own—‘I fear we can hardly do much against them.’

‘Oh, madam, don’t be at all intimidated. We shall soon crush them; crush them, madam, as completely as base plots ever were crushed. They think they can do anything now, because my sister is a poor unprotected girl, with no powerful friends to take up her cause, and only a humble fencing-master for a brother to fight her battle. Ah, if it were a battle that could be fought by a man’s right arm, they should see! But when they find that she has some friends after all, rich and powerful friends, it will be a very different thing, Mrs. Vanthorpe; a very different thing, madam. We’ll soon bring the managers to their knees, and the

press, ma'am, the critics who are now in league against us.'

'But, Mr. Elvin,' Gabrielle said, very earnestly, for she was anxious that the brother and sister should be under no illusions, 'I am afraid you must not think of gaining any rich or powerful friends through me. I am not rich, and my friends are not powerful. I can only offer your sister sympathy and a helping hand.'

'You are a lady, madam, of rank and distinction, whose name is already becoming a household word for deeds of noble and discriminating generosity. Pardon me, Mrs. Vanthorpe, if for once I decline to allow even you to interrupt me; I say this, madam, in your presence, because it is the truth. You have friends among the rich and the powerful. The distinguished young nobleman whose name you did me the great honour to mention to me is celebrated wherever music is known as a patron of the art as judicious as he is generous. A word from him—a word in season, madam—will amply prove to all the world that Gertrude Elvin is no longer an unprotected girl on whom envy may trample with impunity.'

'Well,' Gabrielle said, when this burst of eloquence

had passed away, 'I am sure Mr. Walter Taxal will do all he can to assist anyone who deserves his help, and whom——'

'And whom you recommend, Mrs. Vanthorpe—whom you recommend. Gertrude and I are well aware to whom we shall owe any effort that may perchance be made on her behalf.'

'But you know, Mr. Elvin——'

'I call myself Professor Elvin,' the eloquent fencing-master observed, with a deprecatory movement of his hand and a melancholy smile that seemed to say, 'I know it is a weakness, I know it is not a legal claim; yet prythee indulge me in at least this poor conceit.'

'I beg pardon; of course I should have said Professor Elvin; you know that I do not even pretend to be a qualified judge of singing.'

Professor Elvin made a gesture of earnest protestation, as if to imply that there really could be nothing in musical or any other science concerning which Mrs. Vanthorpe was not a perfectly competent critic, authority, and judge.

'No; I really know very little about it, not nearly enough to make me even fancy myself qualified to have

a decided opinion ; and in any case I should be carried away by my inclinations, and your sister would seem to me to be Patti or Nilsson if I were on her side, as I am.'

'But excuse me,' the Professor said with a smile, 'Patti or Nilsson! We hope to show you that Gertrude has much higher pretensions than to be classed with singers like Patti or Nilsson.'

'I don't think anything of Patti or Nilsson,' the aspirant herself said, in her low thrilling tone. 'They belong to a school with which I have no sympathy; I say so quite apart from any feeling of resentment which I might be justified in entertaining.'

'You see, then,' Gabrielle resumed, 'this only shows how little qualified I am to judge. I thought these were two great singers.'

'You are very good, Mrs. Vanthorpe,' the Professor observed. The comment was intended to imply that it was only out of sheer goodness of heart that Mrs. Vanthorpe condescended to regard such persons as singers at all.

'Then you see,' said Gabrielle, 'I cannot answer for Mr. Taxal's judgment. He perhaps may form a different opinion, Professor Elvin, from that which you

and I form. We can't tell; we shall have to wait until —until——'

'Until he has heard Gertrude? Certainly, Mrs. Vanthorpe; that is what we desire; that is all we desire. We have no fear of the judgment of one so qualified as Mr. Taxal, although he is but an amateur. Gertrude only longs for an opportunity of proving to Mr. Taxal that she is not unworthy of your countenance and recommendation.'

'I am not afraid of the issue,' the aspirant said, first casting her eyes down and then suddenly turning all the light of them full on Gabrielle's face.

'Here is Mr. Taxal, just come in time,' Gabrielle said, delighted that he had come, and delighted too with the courage, the confidence, and the deep bright eyes of the aspirant. 'It is like that I would have a woman,' she thought; 'brave, strong, confident in her powers when she has them.'

Walter Taxal came forward somewhat awkward and timid-looking, and he positively blushed as he was presented to Miss Elvin, and she, having first dropped her eyes on the ground, then raised them to his and fixed him with an imploring gaze. No time was lost in



making the experiment. The aspirant sat down to the piano and accompanied herself; her brother turned the leaves of the piece of music which she had chosen. Walter Taxal's short sight rendered his undertaking such a task a dangerous experiment; and moreover Professor Elvin had gently urged that, to appreciate his sister's singing, the mind should be absolutely free from the strain of any duty, however welcome and graceful. Gabrielle stood behind the singer, full at once of fear and hope. Professor Elvin turned over each leaf with the action of a man delivering a final and triumphant thrust to some rival swordsman.

The singing? Well, Miss Elvin had a voice of tremendous power and compass. There was a raw keen raucous energy about it that at first was positively startling. The little glass drops of the chandelier all rattled and echoed as the first notes played in among them. The strings of a harp at the other end of the room vibrated shrilly. The leaves of open books fluttered and rustled like startled birds. The room seemed to be filled to painful distension with the volume of sound; the singer herself appeared to be possessed by her voice like a sibyl with the prophetic fury. Every



*'This young lady is to be congratulated on the possession of such a voice.'*



limb of her moved; every bone and muscle seemed to be in corresponding motion as the sounds came forth. Her shoulders, her arms, her back, her knees, all were agitated together; not a vein was quiet; the contortions of the sibyl at least were there. When she finished, it was as though she flung voice and song away from her with a passionate energy, like that of Atlas sick of his burden and tossing a world into unending space. Then there was silence, and Professor Elvin fell into an attitude and waited. Gabrielle fixed her eyes beseechingly on Walter Taxal.

‘Great power, great power, quite a tremendous organ; no doubt about that,’ he said, after a moment’s pause. ‘This young lady is to be congratulated, really to be congratulated, on the possession of such a voice.’

‘Not many like that, sir, on the lyric stage now,’ Professor Elvin said defiantly.

‘Not many like it; oh, no, certainly not; very rare, I am quite sure. Yes; the voice is all right enough. A little more, perhaps, of culture, don’t you think? Perhaps a certain want of training may be evident at times. The young lady has not been taught in Italy, perhaps?’

‘No, sir, she has not,’ her brother said sternly.

‘I would suggest,’ Taxal went on, in a deprecating and even timid tone, ‘if it could be arranged, you know, that before venturing on a trial at the hands of any of our great people here—our managers, you know—she should have some little finishing training in Italy. People think so much of Italy; partly a superstition, I dare say, but it might perhaps be well to give in to it.’

‘Then you don’t think my sister is fit to take a place on the lyric stage at once?’

‘Well, I don’t exactly say that; and you must understand that my opinion is that of a mere amateur. I don’t pretend to a decisive judgment of any kind; but I would suggest that a little more training would be well. One can’t suffer, you know, from a little more training at any time.’

Miss Elvin rose from the piano.

‘I might say,’ she said with downcast eyes, ‘that a singer is hardly able to do justice to herself with an instrument like that. It is an excellent piano for all ordinary purposes, I am sure; but it is hardly the instrument for an artist.’

‘Oh, no,’ Gabrielle interposed, seizing the oppor-

tunity for coming to the rescue; 'that piano is nothing that a really great artist ought to touch. I felt all the time that it was not quite fair to Miss Elvin to ask her to sing to it. But I was so anxious to hear her, that I could not wait for a better time.'

'Mrs. Vanthorpe is all goodness,' Professor Elvin said in the tone of one who tenders to his wronger a Christian but reluctant forgiveness.

'Oh, I probably could not have done any better in any case,' Miss Elvin said bitterly.

There was another pause. Everyone felt depressed and awkward. At last Walter Taxal hit upon something to say. He happily remembered that there was to be a concert given in a few days at Lady Honeybell's, in aid of the cause of independence in Thibet, and he thought it would be a capital thing if Miss Elvin were to sing there. It would be a great opportunity. Everyone would be there; some of the most famous singers had promised their assistance, and many of the greatest patrons of art, professional and amateur, would be among the audience. If Miss Elvin made an impression there, it would be a splendid opening for her. He was sure he could promise that Lady Honeybell would

be delighted to enrol Miss Elvin on her list of singers. He would be able to let Miss Elvin know to-morrow.

This happy thought went far to restore satisfaction to the company. Professor Elvin was profuse and statuesque in his manner of returning thanks. Miss Elvin expressed her gratitude with the carefully humbled air of one who submits to being misprised, and wishes it to be understood that, after what has passed, she admits that anything is good enough for her. Gabrielle insisted that for that night at least Miss Elvin must stay with her, as it was too far for her to go home with her brother and return next morning in time to hear the good news which Mr. Taxal was sure to bring about Lady Honeybell and the concert. Gertrude grew brighter at this, and accepted the offer readily. While she spoke a few words to her brother about some commissions he was to execute for her as he was passing through town, Walter Taxal found an opportunity of exchanging a sentence or two with Gabrielle.

‘I hope you are satisfied with what I have said and done for your *protégée*?’ he asked.

‘Only half satisfied,’ Gabrielle replied. ‘At least,

I like what you have done very well, but not what you said. You don't appear to me to be half enthusiastic enough. The poor girl was quite cast down; there were tears in her eyes.'

'Well, but really, you know, one must not go too far in praising beginners. You have no idea how self-conceited some of these people are, and what impossible notions they get into their heads.'

'But surely she has a wonderful voice? Come, you must admit that much, at least.'

'Yes; she has a wonderful voice—very wonderful; that's exactly the word for it. I never heard anything like it; but whether it's going to be wonderfully good or wonderfully bad is what I don't quite profess to know. And look here, Mrs. Vanthorpe, excuse me; don't you take too much trouble about these people; they'll not be grateful to you one bit. You have no idea what such self-conceit can do. That fellow's a cad, depend upon it; he thinks he can trade upon his sister's voice.'

'I am sorry you take it in that way,' Gabrielle said, disappointed. 'I had set my heart on getting that poor girl a chance to be heard, and I know she



will succeed. What do I care about her brother or his manners? I feel for the girl; I am sure she has genius; I know she has, and I only wish I could do something for her.'

'Well, we'll all try to do something for her,' Taxal said, in great alarm lest he should have offended Gabrielle, and wishing he had given it as his opinion that Miss Elvin had gifts more promising than those of any songstress since Malibran. 'I am only afraid of encouraging too much hope, letting her in for disappointment and all that.'

'Men have no sympathy but with the successful,' said Gabrielle sententiously, and forgetting at the moment that the man before her had hardly ever in his life been the advocate of any but some lost and hopeless cause.

'Oh, come, Mrs. Vanthorpe, you must really think a little better of us; and in this case I will do all I can; I'll move heaven and earth, in fact, to show you that I am not so bad as all that, and that I have sympathy with merit even before it succeeds.'

At this moment one of Gabrielle's maids brought her a card from Mr. Lefussis.

‘You have done too much for me to-day already,’ said Gabrielle. ‘Can you stand Mr. Lefussis?’

‘Mr. Anybody for you. I am only too glad to have a chance of making up for my comparative failure to satisfy you as to your musical friend.’

Mr. Lefussis entered, bowing to Gabrielle with ancient grace, and still carrying his hat somehow as if it were one proper to the courtly costume of a Beauclerk or a Wyndham. He had hardly begun to pay his formal respects when she was informed that Mr. and Mrs. Robert Charlton had come, and were waiting below. This was indeed the evening for which Gabrielle had invited our friends, and she had not forgotten the invitation; but she had certainly failed to observe how time was flying in her various other occupations. It was now seven o'clock. She seemed to the kindly Walter to be a little embarrassed by the simultaneous appearance of such a little crowd of visitors. He glanced significantly at Lefussis and then at Gabrielle, and his look clearly asked her, ‘Shall I take him away?’ and her reply, conveyed too in one quiet glance, said, ‘Oh, yes, if you can.’ Gabrielle introduced him to Lefussis with becoming dignity of manner.

‘I begged Mrs. Vanthorpe to be kind enough to introduce me,’ Walter said, ‘although I think you and I have met before, Mr. Lefussis. We have been engaged in the same good cause, I know, more than once. Now, Mrs. Vanthorpe has promised to excuse me, and I hope you will excuse me too; I have to speak at a meeting in the East-end to night, and there is only just time to get a hasty scrap of dinner at my club as I go along. If you don’t mind coming with me, we can jump into a cab, get a morsel of dinner, and you shall accompany me to the meeting, and we can talk over the things you want to speak of as we go along.’

Never was a man more delighted than Mr. Lefussis. He did not even stop to complete the explanation he was beginning to give concerning the lateness of his visit, and the delays which had unavoidably made it so late. He took a grateful but hurried farewell of Gabrielle, and went off with Taxal, feeling as if he were suddenly restored to that delightful world of political movement and of brilliant names from which he had long been an exile. As Walter was disappearing, he cast one glance back upon Gabrielle, which seemed to have almost as much meaning in it as the cry that the soldier

rushing into battle sends back to his great chief, 'You shall praise me this time, O Cæsar.'

Descending the stairs, they met Robert Charlton and Janet. Mr. Lefussis could not refrain from stopping to exchange a word with them in the pride of his heart.

'Glad to see you ; haven't a moment to spare. I am just going to dine with young Taxal, Lord Taxal's son ; we have to attend a very important meeting afterwards. Tell you all about it to-morrow. Good-bye.'

'Fool !' was the murmured observation of Charlton as his friend hurried after Walter Taxal. 'I am sorry we came here, Janet,' he muttered to his wife as they were being shown upstairs.

## CHAPTER VII.

## GABRIELLE'S GUESTS.

A BENEVOLENT person once, so goes the story, invited a beggar from the streets to share a meal with him. He gave the beggar rich meats and dry wines, dessert of rarest fruits, cigars and coffee that might have satisfied any frequenter of the *Café Anglais*. A week after, the beggar met him and put in a plea for a similar banquet. Being denied, he denounced his former entertainer as one who had only given him a tantalising taste for good things, which was never more to be gratified in this life. 'Was I not happy,' the aggrieved mendicant exclaimed, 'before I ever knew that there were things so delightful to be had as turtle soup and dry champagne?'

It is much to be feared that Gabrielle Vanthorpe with the best of motives was entertaining Robert

Charlton with turtle and champagne. Not that these delicacies really were produced this evening when he and his wife took tea in the old-fashioned way with Mrs. Vanthorpe. Gabrielle modelled the little entertainment as much as possible after the fashion to which she knew they were accustomed, lest they, or he at least, might fancy that she was treating them like a patroness. But she was unconsciously feeding poor Robert on a fare to which he was wholly unaccustomed, and which he was not likely to have set before him very often. She talked to him with such friendly, kindly ease; she drew him out so delicately on the subjects he best understood; she deferred with such an appearance of sincerity—indeed it was sincerity and not appearance—to his opinion on many things; she entered with such intelligence into all the political and other questions of general interest he touched upon: that Charlton felt as if he were taken by some sudden magic out of his own hard narrow world with its petty amusements, and its broken glimpses at knowledge, into some delightful sphere where beautiful women enhanced the charm of their beauty by talking like rational men. Mrs. Vanthorpe had a great many books and engravings to show


him, and he talked with much intelligence about them and could tell her many things which she did not know and was glad to learn. She took a genuine pleasure in talking to him, and most of the evening passed agreeably for her. She had her heart set all the time on winning his confidence so thoroughly that he would be at last found willing to take her advice, and then she would talk to him about Janet and make him ashamed of his nonsense, and teach him a true appreciation of his wife and of woman in general, and so make happy for ever the life of the poor fair one with locks of gold.

Janet enjoyed the evening to the full as much as her husband did, although in a different way. She had ever since their marriage been accustomed to sink herself so entirely in him that in order to enjoy anything it was only necessary for her to know that he was enjoying it. They had no children, and, as often happens with a young pair in such case, the protecting maternal sentiment closes around the husband and makes him its object. Janet was proud to see Robert able to talk to a lady of education like Mrs. Vanthorpe, and she anticipated nothing but good from the intervention of one so kind and clever and generous.

The one of the little company who least enjoyed the evening, or rather indeed who did not enjoy it at all, was Miss Elvin. That young lady very quickly found out the social position of Mr. and Mrs. Charlton, and was exceedingly wroth at the idea of being set down to pass an evening with them. She would have liked Mr. Taxal, or some one of that class; but she bitterly resented in her mind the thought of being called upon to amuse people like the Charltons. Gabrielle of course asked her to sing, assuming that she would like to be asked, and afraid that the girl would think her gifts slighted if she were not called upon to display them. Most assuredly if Miss Elvin had not been asked to sing she would have nourished in her mind a very grievous sense of wrong. But now that she was asked, she considered it a great piece of impertinence on the part of Mrs. Vanthorpe to invite her to sing for such people as the Charltons. She received Janet's raptures and Robert's somewhat slow and pedantic dissertations of praise with an air of indifference which he must have observed if he were not thinking so much of himself, and which Janet would probably have noticed only that she hardly ever thought of herself. Gabrielle, whose



habit was to interpret everything to everybody's advantage, ascribed the girl's manner to shyness or the sensitiveness of genius, or some such cause not easily to be understood by common people. In truth, the young aspirant's bosom was already swelling with anger against her unconscious hostess, who was only thinking how she could best help her and please her. Miss Elvin set down Gabrielle as a self-conceited purse-proud spoilt favourite of fortune, who despised Gertrude Elvin because she was only a struggling artist, and deliberately sought to convey to her the conviction that she was only good enough to sit down with Charltons and people of that sort. Were it not for the valuable aid she expected to derive from Gabrielle's patronage, the girl would have indulged in some burst of open ill-humour. But she thought, amid whatever sense of injury, that it would be very convenient to be occasionally asked to stay at Gabrielle's house. She and her brother lived out Camberwell way, and she saw herself in her mind's eye writing letters bearing date from Mrs. Vanthorpe's more fashionable quarter. Nor did she forget Lady Honeybell, and the thought of how very agreeable it would be to be conveyed to Lady



Honeybell's in Mrs. Vanthorpe's carriage. Still more perhaps did her thoughts dwell on Walter Taxal, whom she knew to be the son of a lord, and on whom it was not absolutely impossible that the attractions of a gifted artist who believed herself far from unlovely might work some little impression. Already she was longing for the next day, which was to bring the promised visit of Mr. Taxal and perhaps some good news from Lady Honeybell. All these considerations induced Miss Elvin to 'put up,' as she would herself have expressed it, with a good deal of what she would have called the 'airs' of her hostess; although she could not humour those airs to the extent of manifesting the slightest interest in people like the Charltons.

Gabrielle saw during her talk with Robert Charlton that the young singer seemed rather weary and moody, and that she and Janet were apparently not able to carry on any conversation between themselves or to join in a general talk. She went over to Miss Elvin, who was affecting to look into a music-book at the other end of the room.

'I am afraid you are tired, Miss Elvin; or lonely.

We ought not to have asked you to sing ; it must have fatigued you.'

'Oh, thank you, no,' Miss Elvin said graciously. 'I am a little lonely, perhaps, without my brother. I so seldom go out alone, I hardly know myself without him.'

'I am so sorry,' Gabrielle said quite penitently; 'I ought to have known, I ought not to have asked you to stay. You must forgive me; I never had a brother, and I did not remember for the moment how lonely one must feel without such a companionship when one is used to it.'

This, however, was by no means the sentiment which it would have suited Miss Elvin to encourage. Nothing could have been a more complete frustration of her plans and hopes than that Mrs. Vanthorpe should suppose that she and her brother were inseparable.

'Oh, no, it is not that,' she hastened to explain; 'unfortunately, my brother and I have to be only too often separated as it is, Mrs. Vanthorpe. He has to give lessons out of London—in Brighton and other places, and sometimes I don't see him for days and days together. If I were at home now, the chances are that

I should be sitting alone there. Oh, no, it was not that I meant. What I meant to say was that here in this charming house of yours, made so welcome by your kindness and so happy, it seems a sad thing that he should not be here too; that he should be away, working perhaps with uncongenial people for a living.'

'Ah, yes; I can quite understand that,' Gabrielle said softly. 'If I had a brother I am sure I should feel as you do. There can be no friend like a brother.'

'Pardon me, Mrs. Vanthorpe; you could hardly be expected to feel as I do. You could hardly have the occasion. If you had a brother he would be a gentleman of fortune; he would not be going about the world giving fencing-lessons for a living. You would not be going to face the great cold hard world; to expose yourself to slight and reproach, to fail perhaps.'

'You will not fail, I know; I am sure. We shall hail your complete success before long—and see how young you are! We are all sure of your success. Mr. Charlton understands a great deal about music, and he has just been telling me that he never heard such a voice as yours.'

Miss Elvin's anxiety to please her patroness could

not carry her farther than to express with the very slightest bend of her head an acknowledgment of praise coming from a person like Mr. Charlton.

‘ But the gentleman who was here to-day,’ she said — ‘ when I sang. He was not very sanguine. He said all he could to please you, Mrs. Vanthorpe ; but it was easily to be seen that he was by no means hopeful. My brother, I fear, spoils me with his praise ; he is so sanguine and he is so fond of me.’

‘ But I assure you Mr. Taxal is much more hopeful than he seems ; only he thinks it right to guard against giving too much hope for fear of disappointment. He told me so, when we talked of you before he went.’

‘ You were kind enough to talk to him about me ? ’ Miss Elvin said, turning the full light of her anxious eyes on Gabrielle, and delighted to hear that she had been the subject of conversation.

‘ Yes, of course we did ; what else should we have talked of then ? And he told me he thought it right always to guard against saying too much ; I suppose he does wisely in that, but I confess it is not my way, Miss Elvin. When I feel enthusiasm I must let it be seen ;

but others of course are different. You may trust to his championship all the same.'

'I know that he will try to do anything you ask him, Mrs. Vanthorpe; indeed, who would not? Whatever may come, I shall owe all to you.'

Miss Elvin had grown suddenly very curious on one point. Was Mr. Taxal an admirer of Mrs. Vanthorpe? Was there any probability that she would marry him? Her brother had given her to understand that Mrs. Vanthorpe had suffered so much grief at her husband's death that she never could think of marrying again; but Miss Elvin was convinced that she knew exactly what value to set on womanly resolves of that kind. She thought there was something in the devotedness of Taxal's manner that suggested a love-making and a possible engagement; and it would be of very great importance for her to know whether there was any ground for this impression. She made up her mind that she would find out something on that head before she committed herself in any way either to Mrs. Vanthorpe or to Mr. Taxal. So, being a very clever little person as well as a great artist—clever, that is, when her moods of selfishness and ill-humour did not get

the better of her judgment—she set herself to extract the supposed secret from Gabrielle.

‘I have sung more than once to please myself and to please others to-night, dear Mrs. Vanthorpe—may I not now sing something to please you?’

The manner of the singer was particularly propitiatory and winning. She had seated herself in a suppliant attitude beside Gabrielle on a sofa, shrinking as it were beneath her protecting shadow and looking up to her with all her eyes. Now, Gabrielle was one of those rarest of beings—a heroine who did not know much about music. For musical performances in general she did not even care. Long, long hours of delight had she passed in listening even to such poor music and such poor singing as her own. There were times and moods when one chance chord of a piano wafted to her ears; one sound of the trumpet across the park from the barracks; ay, even one bar on an old hurdy-gurdy, odious and insufferable to the cultivated—would set all her pulses thrilling as if with the deepest influence of music. Often had she in one sound drunk in the full sense of that exquisite saying of Richter’s hero about the music which speaks of things

that in all our lives we have not found and shall never find. But for set musical performances, more especially of the severe and classic order, she had, it must be owned, rather a languid ear. So when Miss Elvin thus gracefully entreated her, she had the misfortune to respond to the invitation by replying that she should be delighted above all things to hear any of the early English or Irish or Scottish ballads—any that Miss Elvin pleased—she loved all of them that she knew, and was sure she should love to hear any one that Miss Elvin might happen to sing. Alas! Miss Elvin never sang that sort of music; oh, never. It did not suit her voice at all. She was so sorry; but she never could sing music like that; in fact, her brother would not wish her to do so, as he feared it would spoil her style.

‘But I wish to sing something for you,’ she said imploringly, ‘something specially for you. Is there anything Mr. Taxal particularly loves? Perhaps as you are such friends you might have a preference for something he likes?’

‘I don’t think I have the least idea of what Mr. Taxal likes,’ Gabrielle said. ‘I have not seen him for a long time until very lately; until I asked him to



come here and talk about you. I fancy he would think my taste in music barbarous, as you do, I am sure, Miss Elvin,' said Gabrielle, not at all annoyed, but, on the contrary, highly amused. 'Sing whatever you like yourself; whatever belongs to your style. I shall be sure to like it; and I hope we shall get you a far more appreciative audience before long.'

This was not, perhaps, a very happy way of putting a singer into great good humour. Miss Elvin performed a song at Gabrielle; it could not be said that she sang. Then she rose from the piano and made a pretty little bow to Gabrielle, as if to say, 'I have now performed my act of fealty.' She regarded herself simply as a martyr. Miss Elvin would have judged of Julius Cæsar, Michael Angelo, Queen Elizabeth, or Madame de Staël, by his or her capacity to appreciate singing; that is to say, the singing of Miss Elvin.

The little company did not blend; it was, if such an illustration may be used, mixed but not compounded. Each of the two guests who would talk at all wanted to talk only to Gabrielle. Robert Charlton was happy to the very fulness of comfort while she talked with him. Her words made him feel clever and eloquent. When

she turned to speak to Miss Elvin or to Janet, he fell under a pall of silence and began to turn over the leaves of illustrated books. While Gabrielle was speaking with him, Miss Elvin openly took refuge in music-books or photographs. The singer cared nothing about such art as Charlton understood. Charlton would just then have been sorely bored by the music of St. Cecilia.

Gabrielle fancied that Janet must be lonely, having so little to do with any conversation that there was. She resolutely told Robert Charlton to talk to Miss Elvin for a little, and she drew Janet into particular conversation with herself. She was anxious, too, to get some account of Janet's fellow-lodgers; to hear about Mr. Lefussis, who was poor, and whom it might be possible in some way to help; and about Mr. Fielding. Janet opined that Lefussis was very poor; but she believed he was proud, and she did not exactly see her way to doing anything much for him of that sort. He made her laugh, poor Mr. Lefussis, Janet said. She had often seen him openly mending his old coat as she passed by his room, and she had seen him blackening the seams with ink. Mr. Fielding? well, she did not fancy Mr. Fielding was particularly well off; but he certainly

appeared to have money to spend sometimes ; and then he always spent it, Janet thought. How did she know ? Well, Robert told her ; but besides she had known him to do ever so many kind things for lodgers who were in difficulty. There was a poor man died in the second floor of the next house ; and Mr. Fielding gave the servant in Janet's house a letter for the widow, and she wasn't to say whom it came from ; and the servant did not say, but she waited to see it opened, and the poor widow found there was nothing but a ten-pound note in it. The lady in charge of the house where Janet lived told her that Mr. Fielding was always doing kind things for her, and for her little girls, and for everybody, when he had the opportunity. Janet began to talk so much about Fielding that Gabrielle feared Mr. Charlton might hear what his good-natured little wife was saying, and wholly misinterpret the nature of her enthusiasm. Partly for this reason and partly because for motives of her own she was pleased to have heard so good an account of Fielding, she began to speak of his appearance with a certain admiration, and to say that she had been rather taken by his manner. Suddenly Robert Charlton, who had been trying very unsucces-

fully to carry on a conversation with Miss Elvin, and who had had all the difficulties of the task hideously aggravated by his desire to hear what Gabrielle and his wife were saying, broke off abruptly in his attentions to the singer and turned to Mrs. Vanthorpe.

‘You were talking of that man Fielding, Mrs. Vanthorpe? I don’t know what to make of him; I sometimes think he is not all right; I have been telling Janet to avoid him.’

There was something in his manner which Gabrielle, for all her good-nature, thought unpleasant and presuming.

‘I know nothing about the gentleman,’ she said coldly; ‘but he appears to me to be a gentleman. I was saying so to your wife. She was afraid I might have supposed him to be rather rude in manner; but I did not.’

‘I don’t know what he does for a living; nor where he gets any money,’ Charlton went on with malice awkwardly disguised. ‘The worst thing about being poor and living in a place like that, Mrs. Vanthorpe, is that it compels one to associate with people of whom one knows nothing.’

Gabrielle did not continue this talk ; but turned to Miss Elvin, who was now sulking in a corner, and said something to her. The little evening hardly recovered the introduction of Fielding's name. Gabrielle thought Charlton looked curiously mean and vulgar while he was endeavouring to insinuate something vague against the young man in Bolingbroke Place. Charlton was angry with himself because he thought he had displeased Gabrielle ; even Janet felt that the atmosphere of the evening had grown less genial. Gabrielle's well-meant hospitality was not turning out a great success. She was a little disappointed herself, and was rather glad when her two guests went away ; although she again assured Janet in friendly whispers that she would never rest in Janet's cause until full success had crowned her efforts.

Robert Charlton hardly spoke a word to his wife all the way home. As they got to the threshold of their dismal house in Bolingbroke Place he said to her abruptly :—

‘ There seems no light in that fellow's windows ; I wonder where he can be at this hour ? ’

‘ Mr. Fielding ? ’

‘Yes; Mr. Fielding, as you call him.’

Janet did not venture upon suggesting that that was probably the right way to call him; at least, that it was the only way known to her.

‘Who knows what the fellow’s name is?’ Charlton fiercely asked. ‘Who knows what he is? I am sure there is something bad about him. People ought to be warned against him.’

They were now in the house, and actually at the door of the little sitting-room which Fielding occupied. Robert had let himself in with a latch-key; a privilege almost necessarily allowed to lodgers in that house. He tried the door of Fielding’s room and found it unlocked. He turned the handle, opened the door, and in spite of Janet’s shrinking back and her whispered protest he stepped into the room, dragging her with him. It was not quite dark. The faintest gleam of soft light was burning in Fielding’s antique lamp.

‘Halloa!’ a voice exclaimed; and Fielding struggled up from a recumbent position on the sofa.

Janet started and almost screamed.

‘Oh! so you are in, then?’ Charlton said a little confusedly. ‘I wasn’t certain; so I just looked in to

see as we were passing. But we must not disturb you.'

'Come, I say,' Fielding said cheerily; 'you did not look in, you know, just to gaze upon this manly form? I am sure Mrs. Charlton didn't, anyhow.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Janet in horrified protest against the very idea of such a thing.

'Of course not; I said so, you know. No, Charlton, my boy, you looked in hoping to find me here, that you and I might have a midnight talk together; and here I am. I wasn't sleeping; only lying on the sofa and thinking out all manner of things. I am so glad you came, you two. The room was getting to be quite filled with ghosts; yes, Mrs. Charlton, ghosts as thick as leaves in that awful place that people quoted until we all got sick of it. Now you two good fellows have come and the ghosts are all gone! Look here'—he turned on the light of his lamp until it burned with a warm and cheerful glow. 'Now we'll have some supper. I never had the pleasure of catching Janet—I mean, of course, Mrs. Robert Charlton—in my humble dwelling before; and she isn't going now until she helps us first to get and then to eat some supper. Charlton, my good



*'He pulled all manner of things to eat and drink from the cupboards.'*



be helpful and friendly to anyone. She only wanted the permission. But as she bustled about the room, and was good-humouredly pushed here and there by Fielding, and called by her Christian name quite as often as not, and Robert Charlton stood by and made no remonstrance at anything, but was evidently resolved to be in the friendliest mood, she certainly did wonder at the changing ways of men ; and she could only fancy that the magic of Mrs. Vanthorpe's sweet influence must be already beginning to work, and that Robert was being cured of his ill-humours and his jealousy. They sat down at last to a pleasant little supper, and Janet was made to have some of the delicious burgundy, which she was not able to admire, honestly thinking it sour and detestable.

‘ And so you have been in the glittering halls of fashion ? ’ Fielding asked. ‘ Come, tell us all about it. You Peris who have been within the portals, tell a poor devil shut out what Paradise is like.’

‘ Lefussis was there,’ Charlton said.

‘ He was going away when we came,’ Janet hastened to explain. ‘ There was a delightful singer there, Mr. Fielding.’

‘Was there really? How much I should have liked to hear him; what did he sing? Anything nice from the music-halls?’

‘Oh, for shame, Mr. Fielding, to think of Mrs. Vanthorpe having anything from the music-halls! And it wasn’t a he at all; it was a young lady.’

‘I shouldn’t have cared for any young lady, were she another St. Cecilia, while that beautiful Mrs. Vanthorpe was there—and while Janet was there; Mrs. Robert Charlton, of course, I mean. With two such in presence, what care I for singers? The talk of some women is far above singing.’

‘Mrs. Vanthorpe looked lovely,’ Janet affirmed.

‘If one could only see her,’ Fielding went on; ‘but she does not invite me. I think I’ll go and take my stand outside her door every day. She must come out sometimes.’

‘You need not do all that,’ Janet said in great good spirits. ‘If you go to the concert at Lady Honeybell’s next Friday she is sure to be there; she is going with the lady who sings.’

Fielding entered perhaps half in jest and certainly half in earnest into the whole question of the concert:

where and when it was to be, and whether admission was to be by payment. Then they talked of other things, and a pleasant hour was quickly away. Janet thought she had never spent so free and happy an evening, and she began to hope that a new life was really opening on her.

But when they were alone in their room together her husband suddenly said :—

‘ Janet, why did you tell that fellow anything about the concert? What is it to him? What does he want there?’

Janet mistook altogether the source of his objection to Fielding’s going to the concert.

‘ Why, Robert, what harm was there in that? We are not going there.’

‘ Yes; I think I shall go.’

‘ Oh! but anyhow I am not going.’

‘ I don’t care about that; I would not have told him anything. I wish you had kept your mouth shut. What business has he going there?’

Janet could not understand her husband’s anger this time. More than once when he was out of humour she had contrived with innocent coquetry to attract

his eyes and his admiration to her beautiful hair as she undid it and rearranged it for the night. She tried the pretty stratagem now again. She loosed the golden locks and let them fall around her shoulders; then coiled them up in some new form, and let them fall anew; she made their sunny splendour gleam under his eyes again and again, but all in vain. Her beauty could not draw him out of his ill-humour by a single hair, nor by all its chains of golden hair, that night.

## CHAPTER VIII.

‘LADY, DOST THOU NOT FEAR TO STRAY?’

THE next day brought Walter Taxal and glad news to Miss Elvin. Lady Honeybell would be delighted to enrol Miss Elvin among the performers at her concert in aid of the cause of independence in Thibet. The thing had happened in the very luckiest manner. A lady who had promised to sing was unfortunately seized with a sudden illness—could anything be so distressing, and so fortunate?—and Lady Honeybell was just about to rush round town to find a substitute when the opportune Walter Taxal came with his request, and the request was accepted as a benefit and a favour. Lady Honeybell sent the kindest, most gracious, most flattering invitation to Miss Elvin, of whose brilliant promise she spoke in the highest terms. She had never heard

of Miss Elvin before, but she was too delighted at the chance of filling up a place in her programme easily to mince her words of gratitude. Miss Elvin was exalted to the highest degree of self-satisfaction. She had never heard of the politicians who used to thank God that we had a House of Lords; but had she known that there were such, she was now in the mood to give heartfelt echo to their pious ejaculation. At least she would have thanked Heaven for a House of Lords, because the existence of a House of Lords means the existence of various houses of ladies—ladies like Lady Honeybell, who recognise genius, and are in a position to help it to its bright goal along its somewhat clouded way. After all, Miss Elvin said to herself, it is only the real aristocracy who can understand art, and when they understand can assist it. What did it matter how a person like Mrs. Vanthorpe might think on a question of art? She was not a lady of rank, like Lady Honeybell. The young songstress was in her heart rather angry with Mrs. Vanthorpe. She looked on the patronage of Lady Honeybell not as something got through Mrs. Vanthorpe's means, but as a providential interposition to rescue her from Mrs. Vanthorpe and transfer her to the

charge of some patroness really worthy of her genius and her certain fame. ' .

Miss Elvin's grudge against Gabrielle did not, however, go the length of inducing her to hasten her departure from Gabrielle's house. On the contrary, she had painted the distance and the inconveniences of her own modest dwelling so ingeniously and pathetically that Gabrielle was induced to hope she would consent to stay with her at least until the concert was over. Miss Elvin assented with words of demure gratefulness, and with the secret hope that she might next be asked to stay at Lady Honeybell's, and then be in a position to show that self-conceited Mrs. Vanthorpe how Gertrude Elvin stood in little need of her patronage. Miss Elvin was one of the persons who in lofty moods are prone to describe themselves even to themselves by both or all their names. She was always telling herself of what Gertrude Elvin ought to do, or was sure to come to, or had no right to endure. .

Meanwhile Gertrude Elvin became for a few days an inmate of Gabrielle's little house, and enjoyed to the very full all its easy luxurious ways—they were indeed luxury to her—and she turned her eyes when-

ever she had a chance on Walter Taxal, and reminded herself of the number of men of rank who, as she had heard, became charmed with great singers and married them. She had not yet succeeded in arriving at any satisfactory conclusion as to the nature of Mr. Taxal's sentiments towards Gabrielle; but she was perfectly certain that Gabrielle was doing all she could to secure him for herself. Meanwhile, the girl's company was pleasant to Gabrielle. It took her away from herself. It gave her the sense of doing some good for somebody; and Gabrielle was never at rest unless when she was disturbing herself in somebody's cause. She was grateful to Miss Elvin for allowing her to hold out that helping hand which the girl took without being grateful for it.

'Now, who in the world are Mrs. Lemuel and her daughter?' Gabrielle asked, on the day before the concert, when Walter Taxal had called to make some arrangement or other with Miss Elvin on the part of Lady Honeybell. 'Mr. Taxal, you know everybody—do you know a Mrs. Lemuel who has sent me her card, with "Mrs. Lemuel and her daughter" on it, and is kind enough to wish to see me?'

'Lemuel?' Taxal said. 'An odd name; I do seem



to have some association with it; but I can't recollect it just at the moment. Lemuel?—isn't that the name of some one in a book?'

'Lemuel was the name of Gulliver for one,' Gabrielle said. 'Perhaps that is the association you have with it?'

'Gulliver?—is that "Gulliver's Travels"? ' Miss Elvin asked. 'I read that book long ago; it is such stuff.'

'No, I was not thinking of that Lemuel,' Walter said; 'I am sure I have some sort of association with the name; and it does seem something like travelling too. Lemuel! Lemuel! What is it?'

The easiest plan appeared to be to see the ladies; and they were accordingly introduced. In her small circle, Gabrielle had become a little talked of as a young woman with a remarkable story, good means, and a generous disposition; and she not seldom received calls from previously unknown ladies, come to ask her aid for all manner of beneficent projects. Mrs. Lemuel proved to be a brisk, wiry little woman, with twinkling eyes that seemed to take in all the four corners of the room at once. Her daughter was thin too, but frail

and delicate-looking ; and had eyes that twinkled much, but did not rove so briskly and to such purpose as her mother’s. Hers was evidently the subjective, her mother’s the objective, nature.

‘I have taken the liberty to call, Mrs. Vanthorpe,’ the elder lady promptly began, ‘because we used to live in the neighbourhood at one time, and we may in a measure call ourselves friends, by right of having once been neighbours. We English are usually so cold—oh, so cold!—and I do not think it right at all. Besides, we have heard of you as of one who delights in doing good ; doing good by stealth, you know, and blushing to find it fame ; oh, quite blushing to find it fame, I see. You may have heard of me, perhaps ? Now, pray don’t say you have not. I am not very vain ; but still, one does work for fame—a little, that is.’

Gabrielle interposed something about her recent life not having allowed her to know much of what was going on in the world.

‘True, true ; oh, of course. Let me then explain myself. I am Mrs. Lemuel, the traveller ; I think I may venture to call myself *the* traveller. I have just published a short narrative of my visit to the Court of

Siam ; the papers are kind enough to speak favourably of it ; but it was really nothing ; quite a little holiday tour. I will ask you to do me the favour to accept a copy of my book "From Lake Superior to Cape Horn : " the idea, you perceive, being that a woman should travel alone from the north of one America to the south of the other. There was nothing in it but that ; it really could hardly be called travelling. I think of doing the same thing for Africa ; that will perhaps be a feat worth talking about—to begin, you understand, at Algiers and come out at the Cape of Good Hope. I should dress as a man, of course ; I usually dress as a man. Just cut the hair short and dress as a man, and you may go anywhere. You ought to try it, Mrs. Vanthorpe ; a woman of your spirit and your youth might be of invaluable service in teaching the world what we poor women can do.'

'Does your daughter go with you ?' Gabrielle asked, looking with some wonder at the frail figure, sallow cheeks, and twinkling eyes of Miss Lemuel.

'My daughter ? oh, no ; she, I am sorry to say, has no taste for travel—no marked taste. She never accompanies me on any great expedition. She believes

she has another purpose in life, and of course we cannot all mould our lives to the same end. My daughter teaches.'

'In schools?' Gabrielle was beginning; 'how very good of her! how useful!'

'In schools, Mrs. Vanthorpe! Oh, no; my daughter does not so narrow herself. No; she teaches in her own rooms to those of her sex who will listen. She tries, as far as a girl may do in such restricted times as ours, to imitate Aspasia—no, I don't mean Aspasia, of course; I mean that very delightful and splendid person of whom we read such noble things—oh, Hypatia, to be sure.'

Gabrielle was attracted more by the daughter than by the mother. She left Mrs. Lemuel to hold Walter Taxal with her glittering eye, seeing that that orb had just fastened upon his; and she turned to Miss Lemuel.

'I wish you would teach me something, Miss Lemuel,' she said. 'I am sure you are doing a good work in the world.'

'If you please,' the young lady interrupted, with eyes that seemed almost to start from her head with sheer eagerness, 'not Miss Lemuel.'

‘I beg your pardon—Miss——?’ for Gabrielle assumed that Mrs. Lemuel had been twice married, and that this was her daughter by her first husband.

‘Claudia Lemuel, if you please. I hold that women are all sisters, and that such vain titles as “Miss” are an offence against their bond of sisterhood. I do not insist on this in the case of anyone who really feels otherwise; I should not presume to address you, for example, otherwise than as Mrs. Vanthorpe, if you prefer to adhere to that form; but I request that I may be personally addressed by my name. I am Claudia Lemuel.’

‘Claudia is a charming name; I shall be delighted to call you Claudia. But in the case, say, of Mr. Taxal—how is he to address you?’

‘If he desires to address me,’ Claudia answered with earnest eyes, ‘he must please to call me by my name. My name is Claudia Lemuel; it is not Miss Lemuel.’

‘But do you really think it of much importance to insist on any particular form?’ Gabrielle mildly pleaded.

‘Of the very greatest importance. I have thought of it long and often; it is a question of fundamental truth. Your name is one thing; you are called another :

what is that but the beginning of a false relationship between the individual and society? and what can come of a false relationship but falsehood?'

'Oh!' was Gabrielle's observation.

'I should be so delighted if you would come one day and hear what I have to say to those who will listen,' Claudia said. 'I speak to my friends on Sunday afternoons. I do not give lectures or make speeches. I object to women who make speeches; speech-making is one of the falsehoods against society that men have invented. I only converse with those who surround me.'

'I shall be much pleased to come and be instructed by you,' Gabrielle replied, greatly interested. 'Do you speak on religious subjects?'

'I expound my creed.'

'Your creed—yes? that is?——'

'Pessimism,' the maiden said with proud eagerness in her avowal. 'I am a pessimist. Not of the common school, you will please to understand——'

'Of the common school? No; I should have supposed not;' and Gabrielle could hardly help smiling.

'No; I do not accept the common doctrine of

pessimism at all. In fact, I do not believe that they who undertake to illustrate it really understand it. It is not enough for me to show that everything is ordained for the worst ; that is but the beginning ; one is only on the threshold then of the great principles which it so concerns women to know. You are not to suppose, either, that that was the doctrine of Schopenhauer, or that I, on the other hand, admit anything that Schopenhauer taught on that or any other subject ; but I would have justice done even to one who so sadly failed to comprehend the true doctrine of pessimism as Schopenhauer, and who showed himself so utterly incapable of appreciating the place of woman in the great development of the human universe.'

All this and a great deal more was rattled off with a velocity that almost took Gabrielle's breath away, and an earnestness that made her feel ashamed that she could not at once throw her own soul into the controversy.

'Well, you shall teach me all about it, Claudia ; I am very ignorant ; but, unlike most ignorant people, I think I am really anxious to learn. Do you live with your mother ?'

'My mother can hardly be said to live anywhere,' the young lady answered; 'she is at present staying at the Langham Hotel; but she is preparing to go on her travels again. I have lived alone since my father's death. I have chambers; and two friends attend me. I should say that the friends are persons who would in the common parlance of the world be called maid-servants; I do not call them so; I call them friends.'

Gabrielle began to wonder whether pessimism consisted in calling things by names different from those in common use.

'You must have found it melancholy living alone so long a time.'

'Why should I find it melancholy? A man lives in chambers by himself; he is not supposed to be melancholy. Why is a woman to be looked on as less self-reliant and self-sufficing?'

'I don't know,' said Gabrielle. 'I live alone, in that sense; and I don't find that I suffer much from my loneliness; but I have not tried it long; and mine is rather a peculiar case. I think if I had a mother I would not live alone.'



‘But if your mother felt that she was called upon to travel through the world?’

‘Ah, then, indeed——,’ said Gabrielle; and she pursued the subject no farther.

‘I am going to give a lecture,’ Mrs. Lemuel suddenly said, turning to Gabrielle: ‘a lecture at St. James’s Hall. I have been asking Mr. Taxal to take the chair. He is so well known as a supporter of every good cause. It is to be called “The Travels of a Lone Woman;” it is to be illustrated with maps and pictures; I thought of something panoramic; but I am afraid I could not work it very well. I would much rather have a woman in the chair, for my part, than even Mr. Taxal. He is too benevolent and will appreciate my motives too well to be offended. It is only for the sake of the cause, Mr. Taxal; to show that we women are not absolutely dependent on you men. Now, if I could prevail on Mrs. Vanthorpe just for once to conquer her congenial modesty, for the sake of a great cause, and take the chair for me——’

‘I am afraid my interest in the cause is not nearly strong enough yet to induce me to do that,’ Gabrielle said. ‘I have no gift of eloquence, Mrs. Lemuel; I

*'LADY, DOST THOU NOT FEAR TO STRAY?'* 181

should only illustrate woman's incapacity for public affairs, and so give a handle to the enemies of your cause.'

'Strange how some women want courage!' Mrs. Lemuel said contemplatively. 'If you had travelled alone like me from Lake Superior to Cape Horn!'

'I think I would rather walk all the way than take the chair at St. James's Hall,' said Gabrielle decisively.

'Strange!' Mrs. Lemuel again said musingly. 'But you will come to my lecture?'

'I will come,' Gabrielle said—'if I can.'

'And Mr. Taxal has promised to take the chair for me?'

'Oh, no, I didn't promise,' Taxal interposed in alarm; 'I said I would think it over, Mrs. Lemuel. But one has so many things to look after, you know; I may have some engagement; in fact, I am sure I have an engagement that evening.'

'But I haven't told you what the evening is to be yet,' the traveller calmly remarked; 'and you can't know that you have an engagement. In fact, I don't know yet myself what the evening may be. It depends upon when I can have the hall; and all sorts of things.'

This was happily vague, and Taxal began to breathe again.

‘You will come and hear me some Sunday?’ Claudia said with supplicating eagerness.

‘I will come and hear you with pleasure,’ Gabrielle said. She was quite taken with the pale eager little girl whose mother, drawn by the call of duty, was about to leave her and travel over Africa. Suddenly the concert in aid of the independence of Thibet occurred to Gabrielle’s mind; and she asked Claudia to accompany her there. Gabrielle never could keep from offering to do something for anyone to whom she felt drawn. The girl delightedly accepted the invitation. Mrs. Lemuel was too closely occupied with the preparations for her own lecture and her travels to attend any such performance. As they were going away, Gabrielle held her hand out to Claudia. The girl hesitated.

‘If you wish,’ she said timidly. ‘If you think it necessary.’ She spoke with the manner of one sincerely anxious not to give offence, and yet acting under the influence of some mysterious principle of duty.

‘I don’t quite understand,’ Gabrielle said; ‘I only meant to shake hands, Claudia.’

‘Yes; but that raises a great question. Why should we shake hands? What real meaning can there be in touching two hands together? It does not insure truth or friendship. It is a form that does not represent a truth; it is therefore a falsehood!’ Then she coloured, conscious that now the whole of the little company were listening to her.

‘Whatever you think right, Claudia,’ said Gabrielle, smiling. ‘I confess I never looked at it in that serious light before. But I am coming to hear you, and you shall tell me all about it and instruct my ignorance.’

‘I shake hands,’ Mrs. Lemuel said, holding forth a stout little fist covered with a man’s glove. ‘I see no infraction of principle in it. My daughter and I do not hold ourselves pledged to each other’s creeds. We are independent. We go our own ways.’

‘Quite so,’ said Gabrielle.

‘Was there ever seen such a pair of fools!’ Miss Elvin exclaimed the moment the mother and daughter had gone.

‘A most dreadful old woman,’ Taxal said; ‘but I fancy she means well. I remember all about her now.’

She has really travelled ; I knew I had some association with the name.'

'I feel deeply for the daughter,' Gabrielle said earnestly. 'All about her impresses me very much. She has a candid generous face. She must lead a melancholy life—such a life for a girl ! I wish I could do something for her.'

'For her too ?' Taxal murmured in a low tone.


'I feel greatly interested in her ; I am sure she has a good heart. Her very dreams and fads and nonsense seem to claim sympathy for her.'

'One can't very well feel sympathy with fools,' Miss Elvin observed, greatly angered at the thought that this absurd girl was to have a seat in Mrs. Vanthorpe's carriage on the all-important day of the concert.

## CHAPTER IX.

## AT A MORNING CONCERT.

LADY HONEYBELL was undoubtedly, as Miss Elvin supposed, a member of the aristocracy. She was the daughter of a Scottish Peer of very ancient family, and she was married to the Earl of Honeybell in the peerage of the United Kingdom. But she did not impress Miss Elvin nearly as much as the singer had expected. She was a bustling, intensely Scotch, and very kindly woman, who went about her drawing-room and tried to make people enjoy themselves on the occasion of the morning concert just as if she had been quite a person of humble class. This was a disappointment to Miss Elvin, who would have liked to find a lady cold, distant, and haughty to other persons, but exquisitely gracious and friendly to Gertrude Elvin.



She would have been pleased, for example, if Lady Honeybell had been rather aristocratically repelling in her treatment of Mrs. Vanthorpe. It would have done Gabrielle good, Miss Elvin thought, and taught her to set a proper value upon artists. But Lady Honeybell was immensely friendly to both of them. She was receiving the company rather as if they were her own guests come to five o'clock tea than as the audience of a concert to which she had lent her house and her patronage.

Gabrielle came early, with Miss Elvin and Miss Lemuel. Mr. Taxal was already there to receive them ; and Lady Honeybell at once bustled out from a little crowd of friends to greet them, and to introduce herself. She put poor Miss Elvin out, to begin with, by addressing her first and mistaking her for Mrs. Vanthorpe.

‘Eh, my dear young woman,’ the kindly Lady Honeybell said, ‘I’ve heard of your story and I’ve heard of your goodness, and I am glad to see ye.’

Here Mr. Taxal interposed, and explained that that lady was Miss Elvin the singer, and not Mrs. Vanthorpe.

' 'Oh, Miss Elvin; to be sure. I hope you'll forgive me; I didn't know. We are ever so much indebted to you, Miss Elvin, for coming forward at so short a notice to help us out with our little concert. And this, then, is Mrs. Vanthorpe? I heard of you, Mrs. Vanthorpe, from my old friend Major Leven—a good man if ever there was one—and from Walter Taxal too. Walter here helps me in all my undertakings, and he has told me about you. This is the first day you have been into any house but your own, he tells me. Well, it is a good cause. You are young to trouble, my dear; but the world is nothing but trouble, they say.' And then some other arrivals called off the attention of Lady Honeybell, and Miss Elvin did not think that she had got very much personally out of the interview so far.

Lord Honeybell, it should be said, was a high and dry old Whig politician who resented every advance that had been made in anything since the Reform Bill of Lord Grey, and who occupied his mind and his time with statistics about the agricultural peasantry, and the question of local as compared with imperial taxation. He never took the slightest interest in any of



his wife's various tastes and occupations. He never appeared at any of the meetings, concerts, and other performances that went on under Lady Honeybell's patronage and in her rooms. She was much concerned with new things, and would patronise a new female acrobat if commended to her as a promising person deserving of an honest lady's introduction. She had been a great spiritualist until the attempt at a too ingenious imposture had roused her robust Scotch common sense into play. She was very fond of helping forward deserving young men in the artistic way, and she loved to see her rooms filled with the pretty faces of girls. She was thoroughly good-hearted, honest, fussy, and whimsical; and she threw her whole soul into each cause or object until it was done with or was supplanted by some other.

The audience soon settled down. Gabrielle sat with Miss Lemuel; Miss Elvin was withdrawn in order that she might take her place among the performers. It was arranged that Mr. Taxal, who was acting as a sort of master of the ceremonies—Lady Honeybell had neither sons nor daughters—should conduct Miss Elvin to Gabrielle's carriage when the concert was over. Ga-

brielle had hardly taken her seat when she became aware of the presence of Mr. Fielding.

He had come in a little late, and did not at first see his way to a seat. But he moved all through the rooms with complete self-possession until he had found a place.

During the performance Gabrielle had full opportunity of studying the features and expression of Mr. Fielding, and she made good use of her time. He was an object of peculiar interest to her, and she had never before had more than a glimpse of him. It was the conviction of Gabrielle Vanthorpe, as it is the conviction in their own case of nearly all persons with quick imaginations and of a good many who have slow imaginations or no imaginations at all, that she had great power of reading the character in the face. As she studied Mr. Fielding's face, neglecting for the purpose many fine exhibitions of musical talent, she came to the certain conclusion that he was a man who had a story behind him. He was still very young, and yet on his face there were melancholy lines which told of more than mere study or reflection or any of the other causes that sometimes cast a shadow over the purple tints

of youth. Gabrielle thought she read the evidences of very varied emotions on that dark mobile face. There were traces there, it seemed to her, of passion and of suffering; perhaps of repentance. The moment he looked up at anything the face all brightened, the soft glance of the dark eyes had a gleam of kindly humour in it; there was something almost sunny in the whole expression. But when Fielding looked down the evening shadows appeared to come over his face again. It did not escape Gabrielle's notice that he was every now and then looking furtively and with a certain anxious keenness round the hall, either as if he were in expectation of the coming of some one for whom he waited: or, for Gabrielle thought it might be read either way, as if he were in fear of the entrance of some one by whom he might be recognised.

He was a gentleman certainly, Gabrielle now said to herself. This was made clear to her in various ways as well as by the whiteness of his hand which she could see. Despite the occasional glance round the room, there was an ease and grace in his whole demeanour, in the very way of his entering the room and taking his seat, and every movement he made, that

showed him to belong to the class which Gabrielle admitted to be that of a gentleman. Janet Charlton was right on that point, and Gabrielle felt now that she had snubbed her somewhat rashly and unjustifiably. Was he poor? surely he must be poor, to inhabit a house like that in Bolingbroke Place with some of its lodgers for his associates. If he were very poor, how did he come to throw away his money on the concert at Lady Honeybell's? So resolute were the promoters of that entertainment to contribute something solid towards the cause of Thibetan independence, that they had made it a determination—so Mr. Taxal had told her—not to give away one single ticket except to the singers and instrumentalists who had offered their services gratuitously in the great cause. Mr. Fielding, then, who lodged in a small room in Bolingbroke Place, must have paid away a guinea for that day's entertainment; and it was clear to Gabrielle that he, like herself, was not listening to the music.

For a moment her attention was drawn away, wholly drawn away, from her study of Fielding by seeing that Major Leven and his wife were among the audience. Mrs. Leven was dressed in deep mourning still. Her

black dress and that of Gabrielle were two sombre spots distinct among all the bright colours of the room, and seeming to mark out these two women in rivalry or community of gloom. It was hardly possible for any eyes to rest upon the one without immediately after singling out the other. 'Are we not enclosed in a common sorrow?' Gabrielle asked herself—'and ought we not to be enclosed in a common sympathy and affection?' She thought with a certain penitent feeling that she had not been so much absorbed in her sorrow as she ought to have been. The face of Albert's mother was wrought into the deepest evidences of mourning. 'Why have we come here at all, we two women with the one trouble?' Gabrielle thought; 'we should be away from a crowd like this, and sympathetic and together.' Mrs. Leven, she assumed, had come at the urgency of her husband, in whose mind it was of far more importance to do the slightest good for any living cause than to remain at home and mourn for the dead. Gabrielle felt the same persuasion; but she could not say that any course of deliberate reflection and decision had induced her to come out in public. Assuredly she could not even pretend to herself that enthusiasm

for the cause of the independence of Thibet had impelled her. So she felt almost like some one detected in wrongdoing by the presence of Mrs. Leven. She would have liked to put herself in Mrs. Leven's way and make an appeal once more to the memories of that old affection which surely could not all be dead as yet, and she would not have refrained from doing this out of any mere dread of something approaching to a scene. But she saw that Mrs. Leven's eyes had rested for a moment on her, and that Mrs. Leven's face became more rigid and chilling in its expression than before. 'She still lays Albert's death to my door,' Gabrielle thought; and the thought sent a shudder through her.

Mr. Fielding, too, was looking at Mrs. Leven. He had perhaps noticed that Gabrielle was looking that way, and followed the direction of her eyes; or he had been drawn by one figure in mourning to look at the other. But now he is looking with evident interest or curiosity on Mrs. Leven's face, and Gabrielle is absorbed in conjecture as to what he sees there. Has he any knowledge of who she is? and, if so, has he any profound and personal interest in studying the changes time had made in her? All Gabrielle's fancies about him came

upon her, and she was thrilled through with anxiety and suspense. Certainly Fielding looked long enough at Mrs. Leven to justify Gabrielle's wonder, and now Mrs. Leven looked up and saw him. He turned his eyes away, but Mrs. Leven appeared to look at him in a wondering and anxious way. Could it be, Gabrielle thought, that she fancies she recognises some trace of a once dear and familiar face? Then Gabrielle began to puzzle herself by thinking whether Fielding could ever have been like Albert Vanthorpe; and though she could not trace any hint of possible resemblance, yet she tried to persuade herself that she could see a certain likeness in the clear and somewhat delicate outlines of Fielding's face to the cold and melancholy beauty—for it still might be called beauty—of Mrs. Leven. In short, our very fanciful heroine was making up for herself a marvellous romance even as she sat there, and was beginning to be possessed by it, as people, whose alarmed fancy tells them of a startling sound, may brood upon the imagining until their ears seem actually to ring with it and to follow every vibration and echo as though such sound were in the air all around them.

Gabrielle's companion had rather a dull time of it

if she was not wholly absorbed in the music or in the cause of Thibet ; for Gabrielle never interchanged even a whispered word with Miss Lemuel during the whole time since she had become aware of the presence of Mr. Fielding. She did indeed awake to attentiveness each time that Miss Elvin came out to sing. The first time Gabrielle saw her led out to the front of the platform, our heroine positively trembled with excitement and forgot all about Mr. Fielding for the moment. She was probably far more excited than the young singer, who showed that serene confidence before the event which is only born of self-conceit, and which so often gives place to mere depression after. Miss Elvin's voice rang through the room ; almost appeared to threaten the safety of the window panes, like a tropical shower of hail. The singer certainly made herself the object of attention and even for a moment of alarm. At first it might have seemed as if she were likely to carry the audience by storm. But after a few seconds the sensation of novelty and alarm died away ; and the voice appeared to have only monotonous power. Those who had been startled into sudden and novel interest subsided again and became languid and forgot all about it. Miss Elvin



went off with but slight applause ; in fact, most of the audience did not know that her performance was coming to an end ; and it was impossible to say whether she had succeeded or failed. Gabrielle's heart sank. She returned to her study of Fielding.

The concert had two parts, and Miss Elvin had a second chance, and did better than the first time. She began with a less tempestuous display of power, and she brought the listeners up to her, so that the effect came at the end rather than at the beginning. A display of mere strength of voice at the end of a song will always carry away a certain portion of any audience, and Miss Elvin had the full benefit of this peculiarity. She received a good deal of applause when she went off the second time, and she had accomplished at least so much that people asked who was the girl with the loud voice ? and was she the same girl who sang the song in the first part ? Gabrielle had the advantage of hearing some of the comments, and of satisfying herself that there is no recognition of abstract laws of beauty among a modern audience. For many spoke of Miss Elvin as decidedly pretty, others as 'quite too lovely,' some as horribly ugly, some as a plain little thing, and some simply as

the girl with the mouth. On the whole, an expert would have said that Miss Elvin's appearance had neither been success nor positive failure; that she had not made a hit, but that she had left it uncertain whether or not she might make it yet. Gabrielle was now only troubled to know how the singer herself would take it.

The concert was over at last, and the audience were melting away. Gabrielle was anxious to avoid crossing the path of Mrs. Leven, and she could not hasten away without waiting for Miss Elvin. The crowd was very great for the size of the room, and there were many recognitions of friends and stoppings to speak to acquaintances and exchanging opinions about the concert and about various other things, not apparently including in any instance the fate of the movement for the independence of Thibet, and Gabrielle suddenly found herself cut off from one of the doors and close to Mr. Fielding.

Of course she might have passed on without seeming to know him. No rule of courtesy bound her to the recognition of a man whom she had seen only once or twice and then in the most casual way, without any ceremony of introduction having been gone through

between them. Or she might have recognised him with a quiet inclination of the head and passed on. But in truth Gabrielle had not the slightest wish to get out of the acquaintance. She wanted rather to get into the acquaintance. So she bowed in the most inviting way as he drew close to the wall to let her pass, and she liked the frank brightness of his smile in return.

‘We have met before,’ Gabrielle said, stopping with her companion and letting the crowd go by; ‘Mr. Fielding, I think?’

‘I had the honour of opening the door for you,’ Fielding said, entirely unembarrassed; ‘you would have been there until now, I fancy, if I had not done so.’

‘You are a great lover of music, I suppose, Mr. Fielding?’

‘Oh, dear no; don’t care about it at all—I mean, about this sort of music. I hate amateur work in anything.’

‘You did not come here for the music, then?’

‘No, I don’t suppose anyone did.’

‘Then you were attracted by the cause?’

‘The cause, Mrs. Vanthorpe? What cause?’

Gabrielle felt sure he pronounced the name of Van-

thorpe with a certain hesitation, almost a tremulousness, as if it were charged with some peculiar emotion.

‘The cause of the independence of Thibet.’

‘I didn’t even know that the concert had anything to do with a cause, and I don’t know anything about Thibet. Who cares about Thibet? I am sure I don’t care if it never was independent. What does it want to be independent of?’

‘Really I don’t know,’ Gabrielle said. ‘I dare say this young lady is better instructed. What is Thibet to be independent of, Claudia?’

‘Oh, I don’t know; I do so wish I knew!’ Claudia exclaimed with all her usual eagerness about everything. ‘I am sure Mamma must know; she knows all about Thibet and every far-off place. I do so wish I had thought of asking her. But my own interests are so different from those of Thibet; I am so absorbed in my own pursuits.’

‘I only came here,’ Gabrielle explained, ‘to hear Miss Elvin sing. Perhaps you came for the same reason, Mr. Fielding?’

‘Miss Elvin? The girl with the dark skin and the

large mouth? No, I think her singing is horrible; she is all airs and affectation.'

'Oh, no, nothing of the kind.'

'Anyhow, I don't care for the screech-owl style.'

'I am deeply interested in her. I want her to succeed beyond all things.'

'So do I now,' Fielding gravely said.

'No, you do not; you can't; you said she sang in the screech-owl style.'

'I have changed my opinion,' he observed as gravely as before. Gabrielle did not like this way of looking at things, and would have drawn out of the conversation altogether if it were not that she had a motive for carrying it on.

'May I have the honour of seeing you to your carriage,' he asked, 'if you are not waiting for any one?'

Before Gabrielle could answer she found the colour rushing to her face and her eyes growing dim. Close beside her, forced by the departing crowd into actual contact with her, were Major and Mrs. Leven. Major Leven held his hand out to her, and said a friendly word or two before the crowd bore him on. Mrs. Leven looked

fixedly at Gabrielle and then at Fielding, and passed on without a word. The agitation of Gabrielle must have been apparent to her companions.

‘Do you know that lady?’ she said to Fielding, without waiting to consider what she was saying.

‘No, I do not know her; but I saw her to-day before, and her face interested me.’

Gabrielle fixed her eyes upon him.

‘That lady,’ she said in a low tone and with some emphasis, ‘is Major Leven’s wife; before she married him she was Mrs. Vanthorpe.’

Undoubtedly the news struck Fielding with something like surprise.

‘That Mrs. Vanthorpe, then, is the Mrs. Vanthorpe—is she long married?’

‘Not much more than a year. You had heard of her before this?’

‘Yes. I had heard of her.’ He was looking in the direction the Levens had taken; he was trying to see Mrs. Leven through the crowd. Then he turned round to Gabrielle and begged her pardon as if he had forgotten to answer something she had said. Gabrielle was inclined to murmur, ‘Oh, my prophetic soul!’

He renewed his offer to see her to the carriage, and they went down the stairs. On the way he said suddenly :—

‘ May I ask what is the relationship between that lady and you? Pray excuse me if I seem at all rude ; but I have a reason.’

‘ Her son was my husband ; he is dead.’

‘ I ought not to have asked such a question,’ he said very earnestly. There was a silence as they went down the stairs. In the minds of both was one common desire, impelled by very different motives. He was trying to get some opportunity or excuse for seeing her again ; she was trying to invent some decent pretext for asking him to see her again. She could not, under the eyes and ears of Miss Lemuel, ask him directly what he knew of the name of Vanthorpe, and why it seemed to have some peculiar associations for him. Suddenly he said :—

‘ Will you excuse me if I speak of that lady again. She had another son ?’

‘ She had another son ; I hope she has still.’

‘ Does she hope so ?’

At that moment Robert Charlton suddenly appeared among the crowd at the door, and, seeing Fielding and

Gabrielle, made a bow to her and hastened away looking very pale and out of humour. Gabrielle also saw Walter Taxal escorting Miss Elvin towards her. There was no possibility of any explanation with Fielding now.

‘Mr. Fielding,’ she said in a hurried whisper, ‘it seems to me that you have said too much or too little. I want to hear something more from you about this other son of Mrs. Vanthorpe—I mean, of Mrs. Leven.’ She was already answering the smile and bow of Mr. Taxal, who was hurrying up with Miss Elvin leaning on his arm. The singer looked gloomy and out of sorts. Fielding made his bow and was gone.

Lady Honeybell’s house was in Piccadilly. Fielding lounged along the street in the direction of Hyde Park, partly, perhaps, because he knew that in that direction lay Gabrielle’s house. He was tormenting himself as he walked slowly on with the thought that he had made an idiot of himself; that he had got into a difficulty from which there was no easy way of getting out; that he had, indeed, to use Gabrielle’s words, said too much or too little. An hour before he would have done almost anything for a chance of speak-



ing to her again ; and now he began to dread the idea of having to speak to her again. 'Were there ever such eyes?' he thought. 'Was there ever such a sweet, unaffected, noble creature? was there ever such a soul?' The impartial reader may perhaps wonder which of Gabrielle's few and not very striking observations filled this intelligent young man with the conviction that she had 'such a soul;' but conviction comes as quickly as gospel light when it beams from soft bright eyes; seeing is indeed believing then. Aladdin had only seen the lovely princess once when he became convinced of her all-goodness as well as her all-loveliness; he had not even spoken to her. Fielding looked back upon many episodes of his own life which in their way he had thought bold and delightful adventures; and he hated the memory of them. The very impulse which had brought him to Lady Honeybell's in the hope of seeing Gabrielle seemed now something to be ashamed of as selfish, intrusive, and mean.

'You saw Gabrielle, Constance?' Major Leven said to his wife, as they were settled in their carriage and going home.

'Yes, I saw her.'

‘I wish you had spoken to her, dear; it will do nothing but harm, that sort of thing. I do think, Constance, you might have spoken to her and let all this foolish quarrel come to an end. You don’t know what harm you may be doing.’

‘Excuse me, George; I don’t see what possible harm I can be doing. I think she appeared to be very happy; she was surrounded by friends.’

‘Yes, exactly, that’s just it; I don’t quite like some of the friends.’

‘I don’t suppose I should like any of her friends. I am sure I know the face of the girl she was with: some woman’s rights orator, I think.’

‘That girl? No, that was the daughter of Mrs. Lemuel the traveller; wife of Tom Lemuel, who used to be Chief Justice at the Cape. Mrs. Lemuel is a very good woman, though she has her odd ways; her heart is in every good cause. I should be glad to see Gabrielle with such a woman’s daughter; it might keep her in serious views of a woman’s business in life. Did you see the man she was talking with?’

‘I think I saw a tall young man with dark eyes.’

‘Well, do you remember old Sir Jacob Fielding?’

‘Sir Jacob Fielding? I think I remember the name; was he something in the city? I never liked city people.’

‘Something in the city? Well, he was in a manner; but he wouldn’t have liked much to hear it put in that way, Constance. He was a member of a great banking-house—Fielding, Lane and Company—and he was one of the most earnest and public-spirited men I ever knew; he was always giving; he would take the chair at anything.’

‘This person you speak of, who was talking with her—is he anything to that Fielding?’

‘By Jove, Constance, he is his son, if I am not more mistaken than ever I was in my life. I haven’t seen him since he was a boy, or little more; but I am sure it is he; and he is very like what old Jacob Fielding himself must have been about that time of life.’

‘Is this Sir Jacob Fielding alive still?’ Mrs. Leven asked with only a languid interest.

‘No, he died four or five years ago. His eldest son, Wilberforce, succeeded to the title; old Jacob was the first baronet, you know. There were two sons; the younger fellow was called Clarkson.’

‘Clarkson?’

‘After the philanthropist—abolitionist—you know, and that was the first cause of quarrel between him and his father. When the young fellow began to grow up, he said his father oughtn’t to have called him such a name as Clarkson. Then the thing went on from bad to worse; the young fellow wouldn’t do anything to please his father, and used to say that his father’s friends were all old humbugs and I don’t know what else, and he wouldn’t go to church, and he wouldn’t go into good society, and he took to reading Darwin, and Herbert Spencer, and at last they hit it off so badly that he went out of the country altogether. They say he was in a cavalry regiment for a while—as a common trooper, you know; and I believe he was in India and America and all sorts of places. What he is doing here I don’t know, but I am deucedly sorry to see Gabrielle in such company.’

‘I dare say she will like him all the better because he did not care for the wishes of his father, but I am sorry to think that such persons should be in my Albert’s house. I ought to have expected it. Perhaps she will marry him.’

‘Oh, come, we must not run away with the story. Gabrielle may have only the slightest acquaintance with him; I dare say she is sought out by lots of people; he may have been introduced to her by someone; she may have been asked to do something for him.’

‘Is he poor?’

‘I suppose so. I know I heard that he never would touch a penny of the allowance his father was willing to continue to make him after they quarrelled. He was a wrong-headed fellow, but I fancy he was a spirited fellow.’

‘He is just the man to please that mad girl,’ Mrs. Leven said. ‘She is sure to look on him as a hero making war against society and conventionality, and I don’t know what else.’

‘I’ll give her a hint, anyhow,’ Major Leven said.

‘It will be thrown away.’

Leven shook his head.

‘You are altogether wrong about that girl, Constance, and you won’t allow yourself to come right. I wish you would go to her like an old friend and—and a mother, in fact; which you very nearly are, whether

you like it or no, and talk to her and advise her. She would take any advice from you.'

'Do you really want to help her, George, and to prevent her from having this person for an acquaintance?'

'Of course I do, Constance. That is exactly what I want to do. I wish you would show me how to do it.'

'I can show you. Go to her and tell her that this young man was a model son and a pattern brother; that he is my idea of a most desirable acquaintance and friend; that I and all respectable friends of hers would particularly wish her to cultivate his acquaintance; and you'll soon see an end to that whim; he will not be very long a visitor at Albert's house.'

Major Leven did not see much use in continuing the discussion just then. He knew that his wife's mind was still set against Gabrielle. Major Leven mentally doubted whether any man could by possibility get himself into such a perverted way of judging, independent and in defiance of all facts and evidence, as this well-educated and intelligent woman had brought herself into with regard to Gabrielle. She had evidently created for herself a Gabrielle who bore not

the slightest resemblance to the living Gabrielle, and who had not one quality in common with the girl she had known and loved for so many years. But in truth Gabrielle was only to Mrs. Leven what a colonial minister or a foreign minister often was to Major Leven himself. Besides, Mrs. Leven was under the necessity of justifying to herself her own anger and implacability; and how could this be done otherwise than by persistently finding sins and causes of offence in Gabrielle? Every day longer that she kept her heart closed against the girl she had been so fond of only made greater necessity for persuading herself that she was not wrong in such a course, and that her love had not turned to hate for nothing. It was not against Gabrielle alone that Mrs. Leven was fighting: it was against her own conscience and her own self-reproach.

Major Leven puzzled himself all the evening to think how he should most delicately approach Gabrielle with some warning against the acquaintance she seemed to be now making. He thought he would go and see her, and then he was afraid he might not have the courage to press his point. He thought of writing her a letter; but then, did it seem quite fair to say anything against

a man of whom he personally knew so little? Then, again, if it should turn out that the man was not old Sir Jacob Fielding's son at all? But no, no; on that point he told himself there could be no doubt. He never was mistaken in a man. Why, there was the fellow he identified at Lahore whom he had only seen once a dozen years before; there was the fellow he knew at a glance when he saw him going into the ball-room at Sydney on the occasion of the Duke of Edinburgh's visit, and whom he only once got a glimpse of in the dock at the Maidstone assizes ever so long before. No, that man was old Jacob Fielding's son. Somehow or other, come what would, he must take care that Gabrielle knew at least what sort of person it was whom she was admitting to her circle of friends. Major Leven's heart was heavy within him.


It would have been heavier still had he known that on returning home that evening Gabrielle, obeying one of her sudden impulses, wrote a short note to Fielding saying that she would take it as a favour if he would call upon her next day.



## CHAPTER X.

## FIELDING GOES A-VISITING.

MR. FIELDING was undoubtedly a man of irregular habits. It would, perhaps, not be incorrect to say that he was irregular on system; irregular as a matter of regularity. He flattered himself that he was one of the few men ever found in the world at one time who have really made up their minds as to what the world is worth to them. If he had a sort of principle in the matter, or had invented one to excuse his personal peculiarities, it was that man is of his own nature, and when let alone, an infinitely better sort of creature than he can be made by merely conforming to the ways of other people. He excused himself, accordingly, for doing exactly as he felt inclined by the argument that any man, if left to himself, will be found a much better fellow than some other man can coerce him to be.



Fielding rose and went to bed, therefore, at any hour of the day or night that suited his humour. Some nights he did not choose to go to bed at all. He read half the night and slept half the day, or did not sleep any part of that day, just as the whim took him. He sought out company when he was in the mood, and he kept away from it when he was not. When in the humour for company he could talk to anyone, and make himself happy with anyone. He had no great opinion of himself; and he was convinced that even when he did a generous thing, it was simply because it pleased him. 'It gives me more pleasure to make a present of that five-pound note than to keep it,' he would say; 'I like the sensation of giving; if I didn't, I wouldn't give. I have thrown away money at Baden-Baden in the old days, and at Monaco, and on the Mississippi boats, for the pleasure of trying my luck. It isn't a worse way of buying amusement than many another. But I find more pleasure sometimes in giving money away; what merit is there in that?'

The morning after the concert he was up rather early. He was restless, and did not feel in the mood for turning to anything in particular. He fancied

nothing would do him more good than a long ramble alone into the country, and he thought of going up the river a certain distance in one of the boats, and then getting out and wandering away along by the banks as far as he pleased. He could either return to town that night or not; or never again, exactly as the humour took him. It was spring, and he thought with a yearning of the budding trees along the river; of the smoke curling up grey against the pale spring sky from cottage-roofs; of canals and towing-paths, and the slow horses heavily tugging at the lazy load; of delightful English downs with long, low, redbrick houses and antique weathercocks, and rooks flying round; of sunlight flickering through the yet unclothed boughs; of boyish holidays, especially of Saturdays. He began to think it would be delightful to keep a lock on the Thames and lie on the grass and do nothing until a boat came up, and then, swinging open the great gate of the lock, to watch the boat as it shot through or dragged heavily through. Or a travelling tinker, he thought, must have a glorious life: slouching along through villages, and having a chat with everybody and doing a bit of work here and there, and sleeping

in barns now and then, or, when the weather was very fine, lying down under the open sky and seeing the stars begin to flicker and dance about over his head as he was dropping asleep. Such a fellow would want for nothing and would be welcome everywhere. He would bring news from place to place, and get the gossip of one village to carry on to another. He would come now and then to some fine old historic city, with a cathedral or a castle, and with the open country and the river seen from every one of its streets : and there he would spend a day or two before wandering off on his travels again.

Any manner of wandering seemed charming now to Fielding, and he might have carried out his project of starting on a tramp that day ; he might possibly not even have returned to Bolingbroke Place any more ; but that the first appearance of the postman there was accompanied by the short note from Gabrielle asking him to call on her. He was delighted ; he was made angry ; he was embarrassed. It could only, of course, be another attempt to get at all that he knew about Vanthorpe ; and there was something in the style of the letter which seemed to his sensitive mood like the com-

mand of one who feels herself vastly superior to him whom she addresses. He was for a moment almost in the humour to say that Mrs. Vanthorpe had written to him as if she were ordering a tradesman to come to her and take some commission from her. But he remembered how Gabrielle always looked and spoke ; and this thought soon died. In truth, it is not pleasant to be summoned by a woman with whom one feels himself fast falling in love merely because she wants to ask you about someone else, in whom she feels an interest that she does not feel in you. And then, in order that injustice may not be done to Fielding by making him out wholly concerned about himself, it ought to be said that he greatly feared the tale he had now to tell of the Vanthorpe he knew would hardly make him a welcome messenger.

A tap at his door was followed, almost before he had time to call out inquiry or invitation, by the appearance of Mr. Lefussis.

‘I have come to consult you, Fielding, on a matter of great importance, or perhaps I should say of delicacy rather than of importance : a question of propriety.’

‘If it is a question of propriety,’ Fielding replied,

‘you have come, Lefussis, to the right shop ; especially if it should happen to be a question of etiquette. Court etiquette I am particularly strong upon. Likewise that of evening parties. I have ceased to study the Complete Guide to the Ball-room, because I have made myself master of its contents, so that I think, in the unhappy event of the work being destroyed, I could supply its place from memory. So you see, Lefussis, in me you have found the very man you wanted. Put out your lantern !’

‘I should not have thought of troubling you, Fielding, on matters of such trivial import. You misconceive me, my dear friend, altogether. This is a question of honourable feeling ; of the course that is permitted to a gentleman. I have the happiness, Fielding, to be acquainted with men of the highest class our ancient aristocracy has nourished ; but this I will say, Fielding—and I have to request, sir, that I may not be interrupted—I will say, sir, even in your presence, that I do not know among those illustrious men anyone whom I believe to have a nicer sense of honour than you have yourself.’

‘All right,’ said Fielding ; ‘go ahead.’

‘ You see that ? ’ and Lefussis tendered a crispy piece of paper to his friend for inspection.

‘ Regardless,’ Fielding answered, ‘ of the fact that anything I now say will be taken down and may be used in evidence against me, I have no hesitation in admitting, Lefussis, that I do see the object you hold out towards me.’

‘ You know what it is ? ’

‘ There have been melancholy intervals during which the rareness of the sight might make me cautious about pledging myself as to identity. But at the moment I should say it was a ten-pound note.’

‘ You are right,’ said Lefussis with an air of triumph, as if he had been backing Fielding to solve some difficult problem and his friend had been successful. ‘ Now look at that and tell me what you make of that,’ and he handed over another piece of paper.

‘ This,’ Fielding declared, after having calmly surveyed it, ‘ I take to be an envelope addressed to “ Jasper Lefussis, Esquire, 3, Bolingbroke Place, West Centre.” Is my interpretation yours, Lefussis ? ’

‘ So far, Fielding, you are undoubtedly correct ; but you have not gone below the surface. Look on the

inside of the envelope, and tell me what you find there.'

Fielding did as he was bidden with a gravity equal to that of Lefussis himself, who never acknowledged, by the faintest smile, the existence of any jest, and possibly never perceived that such a thing had existence. 'I find the words written in a fashion meant, I think, to resemble print: "For Mr. Lefussis; restitution money; a case of conscience."'

'Just so,' and Lefussis patted approvingly Fielding's chest with the back of his lean hand; 'just so. Now comes the question on which I have to ask you, Fielding, as a friend, sincere, I am sure, although recent, to apply all the power of your vigorous intellect and all the keenness of your sense of honour. You have the whole of the evidence in your possession. Such as that document is, the postman has just brought it to me. I know nothing more of it than you do. The question is, am I at liberty to take that money and use it for my own purposes?'

'The question,' Fielding answered, 'does not call for one moment's consideration. Of course you are.'

The eyes of Lefussis brightened.



‘This is a case, you will observe,’ he said, with a certain diminution of the brightness, ‘in which a man is bound to be particularly careful how he trusts to his own impressions. I will not conceal from you, Fielding—I never have concealed from you—the fact that my means are restricted, indeed, very limited: and that the possession of ten pounds is an object to me. But that is the very reason why I must refuse to be guided by any inclinations of my own. Now, to begin with, is this money mine?’

‘Of course it is: whose could it be?’

‘But by what means has it become my property?’

‘I should say the case is clear. The sender declares that he forwards you the money as restitution, as a case of conscience—we can hardly suppose that so sensitively conscientious a person is telling a lie merely for the purpose of getting rid of a ten-pound note. Scrupulous persons have occasionally overcome their scruples, I believe, to get possession of such things; but the other position, Lefussis, is not one to be maintained. May not some one have borrowed the money from you long ago, or swindled you out of it? From

my knowledge of you, Lefussis, I should say that nothing was more probable.'

'Then your decision, as a man of honour, is that I am entitled to keep this money?'

'My decision is that the money is undoubtedly yours.'

'Another question now arises, one of less delicacy, however; rather a question for a practical man of the world. You see this coat, Fielding, that I am now wearing, these garments generally, indeed, and this hat I hold in my hand?'

'I see them,' said Fielding, surveying his friend's exterior with a certain melancholy interest.

'What is your opinion of them generally?'

'I should say,' Fielding answered after proper deliberation, 'that they were very becoming garments in their place—that is to say, in Bolingbroke Place; but that they ought not, if possible, to be displayed outside the limits of that enclosure.'

'Your opinion, Fielding, exactly concurs with my own; but I place greater reliance on yours, because you are a young man, and you observe changes in fashion with a quicker eye than I can pretend to have. The

fact is, I have been invited by Major Leven to breakfast with him, and I will own to you that I was a little in doubt about the cut and condition of these clothes. You will remember my expressing that opinion to you with great frankness, on an occasion of another kind two or three days ago, Fielding, my dear friend ? ’

Fielding remembered it perfectly well.

‘ Strange, is it not, that just in the nick of time, as one might say, this unknown debtor should turn up ? ’

Well, yes, Fielding thought it was strange ; or, no—he did not see that there was anything particularly strange in it. Yet perhaps, if one turned it over, there really was something a little strange in it. So it was settled between them that the thing was to be considered a little strange. Lefussis went his way in high delight, to buy a suit of ready-made clothes in which to present himself at Major Leven’s. ‘ It’s all the more lucky, Fielding,’ he said, as he was departing, ‘ because I have to call at the Foreign Office to-day ; Lord Bosworth has promised to give me another interview, although I happen to know, as a matter of fact, that he has declined to see either Granville or Hartington on the same subject. It is just as well, therefore,

that one has a decent coat ; it looks better, Fielding, it looks better.'

Fielding was evidently getting himself up with some care for his personal appearance that morning. He took a considerable time in dressing after he had got rid of Lefussis. Likewise he looked with curious dissatisfaction at some of his clothes. 'I'm really not much better than dear old Lefussis,' he thought. 'I had better send myself a trifle of restitution-money, and go and buy a coat or two.' Fielding had somehow been put into good spirits by the visit of Lefussis. He was delighted to have been the means of pleasing 'dear old Lefussis,' and inducing him to buy a new coat, as Charlton had sneeringly suggested that he ought to do before going into respectable society ; and he was especially glad that Lefussis had not the faintest suspicion of where the money came from. 'It *is* restitution money ; it is a matter of conscience,' Fielding told himself ; 'I owe something to my own conscience for having made fun of the poor old boy so often, with his Foreign Office and his Lord Bosworth.'

Fielding was standing at his door preparing to go out, when Robert Charlton came down the stairs.

‘Going out early?’ Charlton observed.

‘As you say, early,’ Fielding answered; ‘that is, for me. I suppose you industrious child of art would consider this rather late.’

‘I am a working man,’ Charlton said; ‘I have to keep the working-man’s hours. Going west?’

‘Like the great Orion,’ Fielding replied, ‘I am sloping slowly to the west.’

‘I saw you at the concert yesterday.’

‘You didn’t seem as if you wanted to see much of me, Charlton. You rather sneaked away, I thought.’

‘You seemed to be so agreeably engaged, it would have been a cruelty to intrude myself on you. A charming lady Mrs. Vanthorpe! Are you going to visit her to-day, perhaps?’

‘I am,’ Fielding answered with a sudden sternness, strangely unlike his usual manner. ‘What then? You go to visit her sometimes, don’t you?’

‘When she sends for me,’ Charlton replied. ‘When she wishes me to come to her and take her orders, then I go and take her orders, you understand.’

‘Very well,’ Fielding said, still in the same tone;

‘she has sent for me, and I am going to take her orders.’

‘I am very glad to hear it for your sake; she is a very liberal lady; and I have no doubt she will remunerate you handsomely for any loss of time you may have on her account.’


Fielding looked at him fixedly as he stood slowly beating one hand against the other and looking up with a curious expression of spiteful slyness. Then good-humour prevailed as usual with Fielding, and he laughed.

‘What a discontented malignant old villain you are, to be sure, Charlton!’ he said. ‘I call you old, because you are awfully old, you know. You never could have been young at any time. I firmly believe you are one of the fairies that get changed for the children of honest mortals. Why do you always go on as if some wrong were being done to you by someone? I’m not going to cut you out of Mrs. Vanthorpe’s patronage; she wouldn’t entrust her pretty work into my clumsy hands, I can assure you.’

‘I wish you would not talk of patronage, Fielding—I don’t like it. I have told you already no one

patronises me.' And Charlton disappeared in sudden anger.

He did not go far, however ; for when Fielding was fairly out of sight, Charlton came back, tried Fielding's door, found it open, and went in. He remained in the room for a long time, rummaging among Fielding's papers, with delicate hands too supple and skilful to make any disturbance ; he opened books, looked at envelopes, and, where he had a chance, read letters. Sometimes he heard a sound outside, and then he started like one caught in a crime, and sprang to the attitude of an uncertain visitor who had casually looked into the room expecting to find its owner there. Not many sounds, however, disturbed those dull stairs and passages, after the hours in the day when most of the lodgers went out to their business. As each alarm that had disturbed Charlton proved false, he went quietly back to his search among the papers. Apparently it was some time before he found anything worth his search. Suddenly, however, he came on something which made him clap his hands together in exultation. It was not in outward seeming a great treasure-trove. It was only a little package of letters, some of which were addressed




to 'Mr. Clarkson,' and others to 'Clarkson Selbridge Esq.,' 'Mr. Clarkson Selbridge,' and simply 'Mr. Selbridge.' All these envelopes bore foreign postmarks; none of them were addressed to Bolingbroke Place, or to any place in England. Charlton opened some of them. Those he read were for the most part utterly unimportant—at least, they referred apparently to trivial matters of business or social intercourse of which he could make nothing, and a few were in French. It was not, however, for the contents of the letters that Charlton particularly cared. For aught he knew, they might be concocted on some plan which allowed the merest trivialities to stand for something of unspeakable importance and mystery to the initiated. The point which had interest for him, and made him feel triumphant, was that Fielding had evidently been receiving letters under three different names.

He was satisfied for the present. He put the letters and envelopes carefully back where he had found them. He stopped a moment before opening the door and passing out of the room: suppose anyone should happen to see him? The blood coloured his thin cheeks at the thought. Suppose someone had seen him go into the



room, and noted how long he remained there, and met him as he came out? He could say, of course, that he had gone in to look for Fielding, and had waited some time in the hope that Fielding would return; but suppose someone had seen him who was suspicious, and who asked no questions but set in turn to watch him, and found him another time in Fielding's room? Suppose even some little child saw him, and babbled to other lodgers? In that melancholy house nearly all the residents were poor. Fielding alone was known to have money sometimes; everyone knew that he was liberal of his money now and then; others as well as Charlton might have had an opportunity of observing that he had a costly diamond. Suppose it were to be suspected that Charlton had secreted himself in Fielding's room with the purpose of robbing him? Charlton turned almost sick at the thought. He felt miserably humbled anyhow by his consciousness of having done a disgraceful thing, in thus creeping into Fielding's room with the base purpose of getting at his secrets; but he might have overlooked this, and persuaded himself that he was doing right in trying to expose imposture, were it not for the sort of danger in which his conduct might



involve himself. Suppose anyone should have watched him going into the room and coming out of it, and that soon after Fielding should be robbed? He drew back into the room and almost cowered behind the door as he thought of this. But even while he clung nervously to his shelter the idea occurred to him—suppose Fielding should suddenly return now and find him skulking in the room? This thought was so much more alarming than any other that he hastily pulled the door open and rushed into the passage, to find himself all but confronted with Janet, who was in the act of descending the stairs, and had just reached the turn in the staircase which commanded the spot where her husband stood.

‘Why, Robert!’ was her surprised exclamation.

‘Hush; hold your tongue!’ was Charlton’s angry utterance—as if he had actually done something which demanded silence; as if the walls might hear.

‘Is Mr. Fielding sick?’ Janet asked in a low tone and with alarmed expression as she tripped lightly down the stairs and stood beside him. She thought her husband’s command of silence must be a caution not to disturb a patient.

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‘How do I know?’

‘Why, because you were in his room, and I thought——’

‘I didn’t know that you were much given to thinking,’ he said, recovering himself a little. ‘About Mr. Fielding, perhaps—that might be different. Don’t be alarmed; he is not sick; he is quite well; I saw him only a short time ago.’

‘I thought you might have been looking for him, in his room,’ the unlucky Janet went on unsuspectingly.

‘Were you there all the time, Robert?’

‘All what time?’

‘Since you went out, I mean. Or have you been to the West End and come back already?’

‘What I want to know,’ Charlton said, ‘is what you were doing here, Janet. That’s just the thing I shall trouble you to explain, if you have no objection.’

‘Why, Robert dear, of course, I was going for the silver wire that you wanted. You told me to go for it—don’t you remember?’

‘Oh, I remember a great many things, I can assure you,’ he replied with an emphasis as though his words contained some terrible significance; ‘I don’t forget

anything, I can assure you. Very well, you can go for the silver wire.'

She went her way, pained and puzzled, but uncomplaining, and wishing the spell of Mrs. Vanthorpe's presence might be tried on Robert soon again. Her husband went half way up the stairs and then turned down again and cautiously followed his wife at a distance. It was all very well about the silver wire; but what was the meaning of her passing Fielding's door just at that moment, and her asking in such a tone of alarm about Fielding?

He followed poor Janet until he had made it clear even to his mind that she was only going to buy the silver wire, and that as soon as she had got it she returned to her dull home, where she was to remain alone until he should return to keep her company. Charlton had a great deal of work to do that day, some of it pressing in point of time, and some of a very delicate kind requiring a dexterous manipulation which would in ordinary circumstances have engrossed all his interest. But he did not seem inclined to settle down to work. When he had seen Janet fairly disposed of, he started off for Gabrielle's house, and he took his stand at a

convenient corner from which he could see anybody passing out or in. There or thereabout he was determined to stay until he should see Fielding come out. He would follow Fielding then, and see where he went next.

## CHAPTER XI.

‘ONE DREAM GOES: ANOTHER GROWS.’

THE lot of the patronised has been pretty often deplored. “The patron and the jail” have been classed together as among the cruellest trials of struggling artistic genius. Perhaps, however, there may be a word to say now and then for the sufferings of the patron. Gabrielle Vanthorpe was not looking at the matter from that point of view; for she was too single-minded and generous even to think of herself as the patron of the gifted young daughter of music who was for the time abiding in her house. But it is certain that the companionship of Miss Elvin the evening after the concert and the next morning had a good deal that was trying in it. Miss Elvin had not returned to her home when the concert was over, as she had declared in the first instance that she must certainly do—for how could her brother exist with-

out her any longer?—she had quietly settled herself at Gabrielle's, and said nothing of departing for the present. She was not satisfied with the result of the concert. The applause she got had not been nearly emphatic enough to make her certain of success. The trial was apparently to make all over again. She had not been noticed much by Lady Honeybell as she was leaving the hall; in fact, as it afterwards turned out, Lady Honeybell, in the confusion and crowd of the breaking up, had scarcely seen the little singer, and did not remember in the least who she was. Mr. Taxal had not presented himself at Gabrielle's house that evening, nor indeed had anyone come there at all; and, so far as any outward appearances were concerned, Miss Elvin might as well never have sung at the concert. She and Gabrielle dined alone, and although Miss Elvin liked her dinner very much, she did not particularly care for a mere *tête-à-tête* with her patroness. She therefore assumed an air of patient despondency; she put on the manner of the unappreciated and the misprized; she refused any consoling reassurances of Gabrielle's, and somehow contrived to convey the impression that her comparative failure had come of her having consented



to sing at such a place at all, and that her good nature in yielding to the suggestions of Gabrielle and of Mr. Taxal had been the chief cause of her disaster. It now appeared that her brother had always especially disapproved of her singing at charitable concerts where there were any amateurs; and Miss Elvin took frequent occasion of expressing her remorse at having forgotten even in one instance his wise fraternal injunction.

Gabrielle awoke the next morning with a curious sense of oppression and of anxiety. She was some seconds awake before she could quite realise what this sensation meant. By degrees she remembered that she had been seemingly the innocent cause of Miss Elvin's disappointment; and also that she had written to Fielding, asking him to come and see her; and that on that day therefore she was in all probability to learn something about her late husband's brother. Now that the time was so near at hand she felt a little nervous about the news she was to hear; and a little nervous too as to the step she had taken in inviting to a confidential interview a man of whom she knew next to nothing. She had to listen to a good many plaintive expressions

of disappointment from Miss Elvin at breakfast. The singer had been awake half the night, longing for morning and the newspapers; and now morning and the newspapers had come and brought with them little contentment. The 'Times' had nothing whatever about the concert; the 'Daily News' coolly announced that owing to a pressure of matter it had been compelled to hold over for that day several musical and dramatic notices; the 'Daily Telegraph' had a short paragraph which did not mention Miss Elvin; the 'Morning Post,' concerned only about Lady Honeybell and the distinguished persons who patronised the independence of Thibet, disposed of the concert in a few words of general praise; the 'Standard' gave the names of the performers, but only said that they all acquitted themselves with their accustomed success, and took no account of the fact that one of them at least was a *débutante* thirsting for success but not yet accustomed to it. 'I am not disappointed; no, not in the least! Miss Elvin said; 'I knew it would be so; I knew that the conspiracy would pursue me.' Gabrielle did her best to console the young artist; but the consolation was inefficient, partly for the reason that Gabrielle hardly

understood what the distressed singer was talking about.

It was a relief when, at an hour unusually early for visitors, she was told that Mr. Fielding was waiting to see her. Gabrielle felt, although relieved, a good deal confused too, for she hardly knew what Fielding would think of her invitation, nor was she quite clear on what footing she ought to receive him. It pleased her that he had called at an unusual hour; it showed that he regarded the visit as something in the nature of a matter of business and not an ordinary call made at a lady's house by one of her friends. There was peculiar delicacy, it seemed to her, in Fielding's putting the matter in this way. Still the interview would necessarily be a little out of the common. She thought for a moment of asking the young singer to accompany her to the room where Fielding was waiting; but she dismissed the idea at once. In the first place, Miss Elvin did not seem a very sympathetic person, absorbed as she was now in her own disappointment; and in the next place, Fielding might have some important revelation to make, which ought not to come to the ears of an outsider. Then, again, Gabrielle had always scouted the

idea that a woman is to be restrained by mere forms and fancies from discharging a serious duty ; and was she now to hesitate because the duty involved a quarter of an hour's talk in her own house with a strange man ? As she came to the door of the room where Fielding was waiting, she felt, nevertheless, a curious misgiving, and her heart almost failed her. It came back upon her mind in that instant how she had felt a sensation precisely similar when she was turning into Bolingbroke Place the first day she saw him. It was a tremulous sensation, like a foreboding of something momentous to happen ; a sensation vague and sudden as the quick indefinable association of fancies or memories that a chance note of music, the perfume of a flower, or the sparkle of a wave may bring with it, but not like any of these in its impression ; something *schauderhaft* and ominous. Gabrielle only stopped for a moment, however, and then shook off the absurd feeling and went in.

There was nothing very *eerie* or ominous to meet her eyes when she entered the room. Only a tall, dark-haired young man leaning with his back to the chimney-piece, not wholly without suggestion of danger to the tiny cups and saucers and other bits of ornament and

nick-nack there—perhaps that was the foreboding, Gabrielle thought, as she saw some of her precious trifles thus imperilled. One thing displeased Gabrielle an instant after, she could hardly tell why. As Fielding stood, he had his back to a portrait of Albert Vanthorpe that rested on the chimney-piece, and his figure completely shut out the picture from her eyes.

‘Mr. Fielding,’ she said, ‘I shall make no apology for asking you to come and see me. You know, I suppose, what an interest I must have in all that concerns the family of my husband—my late husband; and you seem to have known something of a brother of his. You said as much to me yourself, and I heard it from others too.’

Fielding was still standing near the chimney-piece, hat in hand; she had not asked him to sit down. She thought the more formal and business-like the meeting could be made the better. Her manner impressed him disagreeably. He remembered what Charlton had said about her that morning. He only bowed slightly and waited for her to go on with what she had to say. She thought she had said enough, and that it was now for him to speak.

‘Well, Mr. Fielding?’ she spoke at last with a certain impatience in her tone.

‘I beg your pardon; you had not quite finished, I think; I didn’t quite understand what you wished me to say.’

‘Oh—didn’t I understand that you knew something of the brother of Mr. Albert Vanthorpe, the son of the lady we saw at the concert the other day?’

There ought to have been something in the words ‘we saw at the concert’ to move Fielding. To be made one, even for a second, and in no matter what passing unmeaning way in that ‘we,’ ought to have been pleasant to his ear. But Fielding had taken a notion into his head which had possession of him. He thought that Gabrielle was treating him *de haut en bas*, as if he were a creature of a different class, sent for to take orders, as Charlton put it. ‘She thinks she is talking to Charlton, I suppose,’ he thought to himself. He had himself said to Charlton that it would delight him to be patronised by her, or to be trodden on by her; but at that time he did not believe that he was likely to be patronised or trodden on by her.

‘I really don’t know, Mrs. Vanthorpe,’ he said

politely, but very coolly, 'whether I ever did meet a son of that lady or not. No name is so uncommon, I suppose, but that there may be persons bearing it who are not related to each other. I am not acquainted with the lady you speak of; how should I know whether I ever met her son?'

But the very way in which you looked at her that day showed that you took some interest in her.'

'Do you think so? That only shows how ladies may be deceived. I had only one reason for looking at her, and that was because I saw you looking at her. I followed your eyes: and I saw that they turned to a lady in black, and I turned to the lady in black. That is the whole of that story, I can assure you.'

Gabrielle was at first disposed to feel offended at this way of putting the matter. It seemed like an impertinent compliment. A faint colour came into her face, and she began to wish that she had not asked Mr. Fielding to come and see her. He saw that she was hurt, and he was not sorry for it. He was in rather a savage mood for the moment. Gabrielle recovered herself at once. She had brought the interview on herself, and she was quite equal to going through with it.

‘But you spoke,’ she said quietly, ‘in a manner which led me to believe that you knew something about one who has long been lost sight of, and in whom I feel a great interest naturally. Besides, you asked me yourself whether she still hoped she had a son; his mother, I mean.’

‘A very innocent question,’ Fielding said.

‘Very; in an ordinary case a very unmeaning question, but in this case it seemed to me to have a meaning; and I thought it meant a great deal. It seemed to me to show that you did know something that much concerns his mother.’

‘But—excuse me—his mother?’

‘You mean that it is his mother’s affair and not mine? That would be a fair enough answer to my curiosity if you had not spoken to me on the matter. But since you did——’

‘No, no, I don’t mean that; I mean that it is not at all certain that that lady is the mother of the Vanthorpe I used to know, since you appear to have heard that I once did know a man of that name.’

‘You are only trifling with me, Mr. Fielding; I am afraid I am wasting your time to no purpose. I see



now that I had no right to ask you any questions or to ask you to come here. I thought there could be no harm in asking you to tell me something about one who might, at least, turn out to be a near connexion of my own. I did not suppose there could be any difficulty in the way; but if there is, I have only to apologise for having put you to all this trouble for nothing. I sometimes do impulsive things; I wish I didn't.'

'So do I,' he said. 'I do impulsive things; I did an impulsive thing when I spoke in any way of all this.'

'I am sorry to have put you to so much trouble,' she said coldly; 'if there is any way in which——'

'In which you can remunerate me for my time and trouble?' he asked—'a money payment, perhaps—so much an hour?'

'I meant nothing of the kind,' Gabrielle answered warmly, 'and you know it very well. I never supposed you were a person to whom one could offer money.'

'When a man is poor,' he said, 'you ladies, I suppose, think he must be looking out for money.'

'But I don't believe you are poor; or if you are, is it not your own fault? Tell me honestly—is it not your own fault? Tell me, am I wrong in speaking to

you this way? Am I wrong in not being offended by your words and your rude manner? Is there no reason why I may have a right to speak to you?’

For she was now quite carried out of herself, first by what seemed his confession of poverty, and next by the sudden return of her former impression that he really was her husband's brother, and that he was for that reason alone evading any answer. She made a movement towards him with eyes all lighted by sympathy and hope, and was on the very point of asking him, ‘Are you not indeed my husband's brother?’ He was simply bewildered by her words and her manner. ‘This is the lady-patroness, indeed,’ he thought at first. ‘She hears that I am poor and at once fancies she is bound to make an offer of service.’ He was touched at the same time by the singular kindness of her manner.

‘Come,’ she said impatiently; ‘if you are poor, is it not your own fault?’

‘Most bad things that happen to us come of our own fault, I suppose,’ he answered slowly. ‘I can blame no one but myself for anything bad that has come on me.’

‘I thought so; I knew that. Come, tell me

honestly—do I not know more of you than you thought at first?’

‘Positively, I don’t know.’

‘Do I not know already who you are?’

He seemed a little staggered at first by this remarkable homethrust. But he pulled himself together, and although there was a higher colour on his face, he only shook his head and said with a smile:—

‘I don’t think so, Mrs. Vanthorpe.’

‘Your name is not Fielding,’ she said abruptly.

‘For whom on earth does she take me?’ Fielding asked of himself. ‘Oh, pardon me,’ he said aloud, ‘my name is Fielding; I sometimes wish it were not.’

‘Your name is Fielding really?’

‘Really and truly—what do you suppose it should be?’ He was much inclined to ask, ‘What would you like it to be?’ and to add, ‘Tell me, and I will call myself accordingly if it pleases you.’

Gabrielle felt dashed to the very ground. Her castle of cards had toppled down. She had made herself ridiculous in the eyes of an absolute stranger. There was no mistake possible as to the seriousness and genuineness of his reply. His face showed the most

utter astonishment when she appealed to him about his name. Her fancy and her impulses had shamefully betrayed her. She could hardly keep the tears from rising in her eyes.

‘Mr. Fielding,’ she said, ‘you must see that I have allowed myself to become the victim of the strangest mistake; it was all my own doing, and I have no one to blame for it. I needn’t tell you what it was; I am always making impulsive mistakes; and this is one of them. Will you do me two great favours: first to forgive the trouble I have imposed on you, and next not to try to guess at any explanation?’ It was part of Gabrielle’s nature to trust herself to anyone, and to believe that she would meet a true man in everybody.

‘I saw there was a mistake,’ Fielding said, making the least of it purposely. ‘You thought I was this missing Vanthorpe? I could wish with all my heart I were, if it could give you any pleasure; it would be turning a good-for-nothing existence to some account. I ought to have spoken out at once, Mrs. Vanthorpe, and then all this mistake would never have come about. But, to speak the truth and shame—my own absurdity, I fancied that you were treating me with contempt for

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being poor; and that is a sort of thing I can't stand even from a lady.'

'See how wrong you were,' Gabrielle said, brightening. 'I did not think you were poor. On the contrary, I thought—in the lucid intervals when I was not occupied with that other ridiculous idea—I thought you were——'

'Rich, perhaps? and living in Bolingbroke Place for the beauty of the situation and the elegance of the apartments?'

'No, not rich, perhaps, but certainly not poor; I never thought of your being poor.'

'Why not, Mrs. Vanthorpe?'

'I don't really know; you did not seem to me to have the manners of a poor man—you seemed too independent.'

He smiled.

'What you call independence of manner is very often only the surest proof of poverty. It is like the Spanish beggar's ragged mantle, which the more ragged it is the more proudly he draws it around him.'

'At all events,' she said warmly, 'I knew you were a gentleman, and I know that still.'

‘Thank heaven, bad as we are, we have not yet come to make it a social law that there can’t be a poor gentleman.’

‘Can nothing be done?’ she said simply and very gently. ‘You ought not to be poor; you have talents and education, anyone can see that. I have some friends, Mr. Fielding, who perhaps could do something to get a man of talent a way of showing what he can do. If you would only not be so very, very independent—if you would only tell me what you can do, and allow me to speak to one or two friends, why, something might be done.’ The conclusion of the sentence was lame, but the feeling which dictated it had wings.

There was something so winning in her sweet kindly way, so winning in the very delicacy which made it difficult for her to bring her sentence to anything like a properly rounded period, that Fielding felt himself really growing into that mood which he had described to Charlton when he vowed that nothing would please him more than to be patronised by her. She saw his hesitation, but in her impulsive way guessed at its cause wrongly.

'Come,' she said, taking courage as he seemed embarrassed; 'I can quite understand you, Mr. Fielding. You are terribly independent, and above all things you don't like, I dare say, taking a helping hand from a woman. But a woman may be a very useful and sensible friend, I can assure you. Come, I have heard many good things of you from Mrs. Charlton, and I owe you some thanks for taking the trouble to come here, and not laughing at my mistake, which would have annoyed me very much. Let me try to serve you if I can. Tell me what you are trying to do in London, and perhaps I may be able to do something to put you in the right way.'

'You are putting me in the right way already.'

'How so, Mr. Fielding?'

'Why, simply by being so kind and taking such an interest in me; is that nothing?'

'Oh no, that's not much; I take an interest in so many people. I want to be more of a friend than that. I have taken it into my head that you are an artist or an author. Now, I have some friends who know great artists and great authors. Can't I serve you in some way?'

‘Will you let me think it over a little before I ask any favour?’

‘Surely yes; I should like you to think it over.’

‘Then may I come and see you again, when I have thought it over and made up my mind?’

‘I shall be pleased to see you at any time, and I feel greatly obliged to you for having taken my offer exactly as it was meant.’

He had grown marvellously sententious, and he seemed under a very cloud of embarrassment. The kinder she was, the more anxious he became to put off telling his Vanthorpe story. He went away almost immediately, and it was only after he had gone that Gabrielle remembered he had not told her a single word about the missing Vanthorpe. In truth, she felt so greatly dashed at the ludicrous bursting of one of her fancy bubbles, that she had not composure enough to remember that other conjectures well worth considering, probabilities well deserving of thought, remained still undisturbed. It was certain that Fielding had known some Vanthorpe, that Fielding had some objection to tell all he knew, and that in Fielding’s mind there was some doubt whether Vanthorpe’s mother would be glad



or sorry if he still lived. Here surely was unexplained mystery enough to satisfy the most romantic young woman that she had something still to find out; and Gabrielle had allowed the one man who knew all about it to go away without explaining a single word. 'What a fool he must think I am! How ridiculous I have made myself! Shall I always make myself ridiculous in this kind of way? Shall I never be able to control any impulse or to act as ordinary human beings act?'

Then again she consoled herself with the reflection that after all she had found out something that no one else had got any clue to—she had found a man who could tell something about the lost Vanthorpe, and it was only the other day that Major Leven had said it would be of great importance for the sake of Mrs. Leven if any trace of the vanished prodigal could be found. It had been Gabrielle's dream to become in some way the benefactress of Mrs. Leven, and now who should say that after all she might not realise her hope by finding out the lost son, and reconciling him and her? Fielding's ominous doubt as to whether the mother of the Vanthorpe he had known would be glad to hear that her son was living, may have been only because the son was

poor ; some mothers were mean and selfish like that, Gabrielle supposed ; but she knew that Mrs. Leven was not one of these ; and anyhow poverty was a defect that could be repaired if only the sundered mother and son could be brought together again. On the whole, Gabrielle thought after a while that she had some right to be reassured, and that she had not made such a bad morning's work of it after all. One thing certain was that she must somehow contrive to see Fielding again. Would it do to ask Major Leven to go to him, and find out all about things ? Oh, no, Gabrielle settled, after one or two moments' reflection, that would never do. Fielding might refuse to be communicative if challenged in that formal way. Besides, it was possible, although she hoped only possible in the remotest way, that something had to be told which would shock Mrs. Leven to hear, and then how unfair and wrong to put the responsibility on Major Leven of keeping a secret from his wife ! There was no way, Gabrielle convinced herself, of solving all the difficulties, but for her to see Fielding again, and beg him to be explicit, and then act according to her own best judgment—in which, despite any recent mistakes, she still retained much confidence.

In all perplexity or distress it was her way to seclude herself in the room consecrated to the memory of Albert Vanthorpe, and meditate there, and make it her oratory and her shrine, and seek for help and guidance there. She hid herself there now. But her mind was morbidly active that day, and her mood of quick awakened curiosity did not seem suited to such a place. She found her thoughts straying incessantly, tantalizingly, from the associations that the room inspired, away to conjectures as to what story Fielding could have to tell, and how she could contrive decorously to get to confidential speech of him again, and who Fielding was, and what she could do for him, and why he lived in Bolingbroke Place, and what he must have thought of her. It was certain that he was a gentleman and a man of education, she thought; she was sure he must be an artist or an author; artists and authors when they were young were very often poor, she had heard, and lived in regions even less attractive than Bolingbroke Place. In the end, of course, they became splendid successes, those who had real merit in them; they wrote books that all the world read, and all the world ran after them, or they became presidents of the Royal Academy. She

was sure Mr. Fielding was just the man to write a great book, or to become President of the Royal Academy. What a glorious career ; how sublime a life that which led to such a success ; what a great thing to be a man who could put his foot even on the lowest round of such a ladder—and for those who could not pretend to such a career, how glorious to be the means of lending a helping hand in time to that struggling genius whose seraph flight was so often checked by poverty and friendlessness ! If she could thus make her life sublime by assisting such a flight, how happy she should be ! She resolved that at least she would try, and that no miserable feminine fear of being misunderstood should bar her purpose. Fielding's very peculiarities of manner seemed the natural expression of the proud independent consciousness of genius. His every word showed that noble scorn of patronage that she knew must be in the soul of each true artist. 'Can I have offended him ? Can I have seemed as if I were trying to act the part of an insolent patroness to him ?' she thought in alarm and shame ; and then it suddenly occurred to her that these feelings were not exactly in harmony with the associations of that solemn sacred chamber, and she abased

herself before Albert Vanthorpe's memory. But when she was called out to see some visitor she was not sorry for an excuse to leave the room. She felt like a devotee who has for once detected himself in mere worldly cares and ambitions in the presence of the image of his saint.

## CHAPTER XII.

WHERE FIELDING WENT NEXT, AND NEXT.

‘I WISH I were an artist; I wish I were an author,’ was Fielding’s thought as he passed from Gabrielle’s door, all unconscious of any curious eyes following his movements. ‘I wonder could I write a book if I were to try; or paint a picture, or compose an opera? I don’t see why I shouldn’t write a book—a book of travels perhaps, or a novel—a sensation novel, and make Bolingbroke Place the scene of some awful mystery or murder. It is just the spot for something of the kind. While I was doing it I could go and see Mrs. Vanthorpe every now and then, and take her opinion about it; and make her think I had no chance of getting anyone to publish it, except through her; and never get it finished; and always have her for my patroness. I might bring poor Vanthorpe into it.’

The thought of Vanthorpe broke grimly in on the sweet tantalizing whimsical fancies of the young man. There was a painful reality there which did not harmonise with his dream of some literary Penelope's-web to be kept always going on and never finished under the kindly eyes of Gabrielle Vanthorpe. He lounged listlessly, not well knowing what he was actually doing, towards Kensington Gardens. On the way he passed many a house which he had known, and where he had been welcome in old days; and he fell to thinking of the old days and the inmates of this house and that, and whether they were alive still, and whether they would remember him or care to see him if they were alive. He began wondering too whether he had really gained much in independence, or experience, or strength, or soul, or anything since he made up his mind in his boyhood to cast in his lot with freedom and to have done with the respectabilities and the conventionalities. He had passed the same houses many a time, even since his latest return to London, and he had not thought about them in such a way, nor moralized about himself and his past career. Why was he moralizing and questioning now?

Major Leven was right. The young man in Bolingbroke Place was the second son of old Sir Jacob Fielding, a great city man of that august class out of whom no one thinks of making a Lord Mayor; a philanthropist who went in for every conceivable good cause, and also for religion and morality. Sir Jacob took the chair at all manner of philanthropic meetings. His cheque-book never failed any virtuous enterprise which was likely to be noticed in the newspapers or to attract the attention of any princely or even ducal person. He was a thoroughly good man in the narrow and what we may call the vulgar sense. He honestly believed that the whole duty of humanity was to be respectable. A once strange product of our curious civilisation, a product now grown too common to attract attention or to call for any comment, is that respectability which has nothing to do with any of the positive virtues of manhood, but accomplishes its mission and earns its title by allowing its name to be put down on a committee-list, and signing away by cheque sums of money which it never misses.

When Jacob Fielding was young, he married a woman who was not handsome, but who had a fortune.



She had one son whom he called Wilberforce Fielding, and she died soon after. Many years passed away, and Jacob, who was now Sir Jacob with a baronet's title given in reward of his philanthropic cheques, married Miss Selbridge, a young and pretty woman of good family who had no money and whose people talked her into the match. It suited them to have her married to this very rich and highly respectable man; and it suited him, for it gave him at least a sort of left-handed connexion with the better society of London. But it did not suit the poor young woman at all. For she had not only a warm heart but an artistic sort of nature which found Sir Jacob's home heavy and dull; and she had a considerable amount of humour which enabled her to see its ludicrous side rather too clearly. She had one child, the boy whom, in her despite, Sir Jacob would call Clarkson, after one of the heroes of Sir Jacob's own youth; and it was not long before Clarkson's mother died and left her child to be brought up by Sir Jacob. The young Clarkson never gave satisfaction. He had a great deal of his mother's nature in him, to begin with; and almost from his very childhood he had got it somehow into his head that she had been

the victim of some kind of harsh treatment. This was decidedly a mistake. She had always been treated well by Sir Jacob; the only wrong done to her being that she was provided with a wealthy match which many other girls, even of family better than hers, would have jumped at. But then she was not like most other girls, and her son turned out not to be like most other young men. He seemed from the first to resent his name and his position. He hated to be called Clarkson; he did not believe in his father's philanthropy. His brother was too old to be anything like a companion to him. A pious tutor to whom he was assigned for a time deplored the fatal fact that what he called a dreadful modern spirit of analysis had taken possession of Clarkson's mind, which led him to hold nothing sacred from inquiry. Withal he was imperturbably good-humoured. He would not go to either of the great universities. He insisted that the universities destroyed all the fresh manhood of thought; and to Sir Jacob's mind there could be nothing respectable which had not that hall-mark of the universities denied to his own dissenting younger days. So Clarkson went first to Heidelberg, where he learned Pessimism, and then to

Paris, where he took to the Latin Quarter a good deal; and when he came home he made fun openly of his father's guests, and tried to rouse his elder brother into mutiny against the respectabilities, like himself. He declined to go to church on the Sunday when they were in the country; for Sir Jacob had long conformed to the Establishment; and at last he left his father's house altogether. There was no quarrel, at least on his part. He was as sweet-tempered as he was unmanageable. He merely said that the kind of life his father and brother were leading was stifling him, and that he could not stand any more of it.

Sir Jacob was not sorry on the whole when his younger son was fairly gone. The elder son promised to become a very reputable head of a rising county family in time; and the younger was always making fun of what he politely called playing at aristocracy. These unseemly jests of his were made all the less welcome by the fact that any manner of connexion the Fieldings might have with aristocracy came from this irreverent Clarkson's mother. In many ways it was a relief to the household in town and country when Clarkson was gone. He admired nothing that his father really

admired, and that his elder brother was willing for the credit of the family to take on trust. He made caricatures of the paintings by Sir Thomas Lawrence ; he was always insinuating that the antique family furniture was bought brand-new in Tottenham Court Road ; he laughed at a supposed Raphael which it ought to have been an article of faith to accept as genuine ; and he did not care about Zachary Macaulay.

Once or twice at long intervals the good-humoured prodigal returned to London. But he did not visit his father or his brother ; and they did not even know of his having been so near to them. He lived where he pleased and as he pleased. He was fond of quoting a line from Savage Landor, about one who ‘warmed both hands before the fire of life.’ This was evidently what he believed himself to be doing. He liked the ups and downs of life ; he found a certain interest in receiving fortune’s buffets as well as her rewards. He was free and happy. He was thousands of miles away from London when he heard of his father’s death, and it was very old news when the tidings reached him. Then he was stricken with a sudden and a deep penitence. His emotional generous nature drove him into repent.

ance. He had had some strokes of surprising good luck in one of the many speculations into which he successively flung himself in the American States; but he threw up the occupation and hurried home, not particularly knowing what he wanted there. On returning to London he hastened to his father's house, no doubt with some thoughts on the way of that other penitent who once came back to the house of his father. At the very door he saw his brother, Sir Wilberforce Fielding, mounting his horse for a ride in the park. Sir Wilberforce looked at him, but did not recognise him; had not even, it was evident, any faint suspicion of ever having seen him before. Sir Wilberforce looked healthy, rosy, and very happy. The returned prodigal thought his own lamentations and repentances would have seemed ridiculously out of place under such circumstances. He allowed his brother to mount his horse and ride away undisturbed. He felt very much of a stranger in London then. Still, he thought as he was there he might as well stay for a little and see how his brother got on, and whether he was a person at all likely to be touched by a fraternal reconciliation. He went, seeking meanwhile for new sensations, in quest

of some odd and interesting spot wherein to establish himself for the moment. Chance took him to Bolingbroke Place.

He followed his whim, as he had always done thus far, and settled there as a lodger with the other lodgers. The house looked grim and phantom-haunted, and he thought there ought to be legends there, and odd people and adventures. He loved his fellow-man, not indeed in the philanthropist's sense, although he was always ready to do a good turn for anyone, but in the sense that he liked to talk to any sort of fellow-man or woman, and to be for the moment hail-fellow-well-met with the same. He had 'run' life, as the Americans say, on that principle everywhere, and he had found delight in it. He did not see why he might not find some gratification in Bolingbroke Place too. He soon came to know its inmates and to be fond of them in a certain sense. He really had a strong liking for 'dear old Lefussis,' even while he laughed at him; he thought Janet the best creature in petticoats he had ever known; and he was interested in the blended cleverness and shortsightedness, the vanity, the ill-humours and the aspirations of Robert Charlton. He would, however,

probably soon have had enough of all this and have left the place and gone somewhere else, possibly out of London altogether, but for the curious chance that threw in his way a young and handsome woman who bore the name of Vanthorpe. That name had some associations for him; and he was at once compelled to look with interest on the woman who bore it. Among all his varied experiences, he had never yet been really in love.

Robert Charlton had never before had to do with a thoroughly purposeless man. Such a personage it seemed to him he had undertaken to watch and to study when he set himself to follow the mysterious Fielding. Charlton's life had been narrow and monotonous to an almost incredible degree. He had hardly any acquaintances, and no friends. He had always been working hard, and had seen those around him, men and women, working hard too for dear life. It was bewildering to him now beyond measure to notice the movements of Fielding, who, on this trying day, seemed absolutely not to know what to do with himself. Charlton had made up his mind that there must be something wrong about Fielding, and that a clue would be got to a dis-

covery by watching him for a whole day and seeing where he went and what he did. So he watched Fielding into Kensington Gardens, where the idle young man sat by the Round Pond for at least two mortal hours, apparently doing nothing but lazily watching the ripples of the pool and the sportings of the water-fowl. At last Fielding got up; and Robert, welcoming any change, made haste to follow at a safe distance. But Fielding had not gone far before he stretched himself out on a seat and occupied himself in looking up at the trees and the faint blue of the spring sky. Charlton's life had been all too dull and narrow to allow him to cultivate any taste for grass and trees and skies; and the delicious sense of spring borne in that day on others by the soft west wind had no influence on him. Another hour went by in this fashion. Then Fielding got up and strode away as one who has made up his mind to do something. So indeed he had. It was not all idleness which had held him by the pond and under the trees; he was really thinking something out and making up his mind. He crossed rapidly the range of parks between Oxford Street and Great George Street, and he made for Westminster Bridge. It cost



Robert Charlton some trouble to keep up with the tall young man, who seemed now as eager to get on as he had appeared anxious to kill time by idleness before. Across the bridge he went and pierced far into the south side. At last he came to a rather pretty-looking row or terrace of small houses, railed off from the rest of the street. There Fielding went up to a door, and knocked. He only remained a few minutes. He did not go in. Evidently, Charlton thought, the person he sought was not at home. Fielding strode on to Kennington Park, whither too Robert followed him ; and there was another long lounge on a seat. Up again, and back to the house in the terrace. The same result apparently. Then Fielding went rapidly northward again. He was not going to wait any longer for the person in the terrace, Charlton thought. Robert lingered long enough to take mental note of the number of the house, and then followed. He came in sight of Fielding as the latter was crossing Westminster Bridge. He followed him into the Pall Mall region, and there Fielding turned into a French *restaurant*. Charlton was tired and very hungry, and would fain have had a morsel to eat, and he became savage in his heart with

Fielding for entering the *restaurant*. That was another of Fielding's offences. But Charlton would not turn in anywhere for anything to eat, or give up the chase so soon, although it was now late in the evening and dark. He hung about weary and dispirited to the lowest degree, until, after what seemed to him an almost unending time, Fielding came out. Again he made for the south side, and Charlton felt a glow of new vital power in the encouraging conviction that there really was some business of surpassing importance drawing Fielding to the house in the terrace. With fresh vigour he followed the chase. The same house; the same result. As Fielding left the door for the third time it occurred to Charlton that he might do something better now than merely follow him. When Fielding had disappeared he went boldly up to the house and knocked, and asked the servant who opened the door if Mr. Stephens—he took the first name that occurred to him—had been there that day? She didn't know, the girl said civilly; a gentleman had called three times, but she didn't know what his name was; she had not been living there long; he came to see Mrs. Clarkson, and Mrs. Clarkson weren't at home. He was coming again

to-morrow. Robert said something about an appointment there to meet Mr. Stephens; but he supposed he had mistaken the hour. Did the gentleman who called three times ask for him--Mr. Green?—Robert's invention was taxed for a second name on the spur of the moment. No; the gentleman only asked for Mrs. Clarkson. Charlton thanked her for her civility and hurried away. He did not succeed in recovering the track of Fielding any more that evening, but he thought he had got at the beginning of a discovery of some kind. He did not fail to remember that some of the letters he had seen in Fielding's room were addressed to the name of Clarkson. It was evident that Fielding had sometimes passed by the name of Clarkson; and now he was paying three hasty and seemingly anxious visits in one day at the house of a person described as Mrs. Clarkson. Robert had read with keen interest in the papers about men carrying on brilliant and successful swindles by passing off under different names, in different parts of England, and having the assistance of women confederates equally disguised. Why should not this be some instance of the kind? He was convinced that there was some mystery or other connected

with that house on the Surrey side, and that he had come upon the track of it. In all the varied workings of conjecture in the human mind we do not know that there is any authentic record of anybody having reason to believe that anybody else is engaged in concealing something, and even for a moment supposing that the concealment has a worthy motive. Yet it ought not to take much observation of life, one would think, to teach us that there are men and women who do sometimes make secrets of what it would only be to their credit to have known. Charlton had in any case a suspicious nature, made more suspicious by his almost solitary, brooding, and unhealthy life. He was not likely to think that there could be any mystery connected with the house on the south side, the discovery of which would not be to the discredit and the confusion of Fielding.

He felt elate at first because he had got on the path to some mystery. The elation lasted him while he was taking a poor and hasty dinner in a small chop-house near Westminster Bridge, but as he sat there alone, in the dim light of the mean public-room after his meal, he began to think how late it was, and how he had squandered a whole day from the work that in general he

loved, and he wondered what Janet would think of his long absence. He thought of the possibility of Fielding arriving at Bolingbroke Place before him, and seeing Janet and hearing from her unsuspecting lips some expressions of amazement and alarm at that absence. Then he thought of the kind of business to which he had given up so many hours, and how hideously unlike it was to anything he would once have pictured as the fitting occupation of a man who aspired to be successful and distinguished, and he began to feel miserably humiliated. He began to think with a kind of horror that he must now henceforth sink down and down. He could not make up his mind for a long time to go home; he shrank from meeting Janet face to face. He wandered through lonely streets and hung over gloomy bridges, and gazed into sad waters, until suddenly the moon rose and made the river look bright, and he found the brightness unbearable and fled from it.

Janet was accustomed to go to bed early and leave her husband sitting up. She usually arranged a small supper for him, and then took herself off at some seemly hour, leaving him to outwatch the Bear if he felt inclined. It seemed to her only the proper and natural

thing that a scholar, as she firmly believed her husband to be, should sit up to a late hour and read, unvexed by woman's chatter. But then, when she went to bed, Robert was always in the sitting-room, and there was the genial sense of his presence and his nearness. She could see his lamp full on, or at least could catch its light streaming into the room where she lay; and it was an assurance that her husband was near and was, one might say, keeping her company. More than once when she could not sleep she had glided softly out of bed and crept to the door of the room, and looked in upon him as he read or worked, and she felt happy because he was there and she could look on him. But this night Robert had not come home, and that was a strange thing to her. She had not seen him since the forenoon, and then his manner was strange and hard and she did not understand him. The spell that Mrs. Vanthorpe was to work had clearly not begun to operate yet; but Robert and she were to spend an evening soon again with Mrs. Vanthorpe, and then, perhaps, something might come of it. So far, almost everything was unsatisfactory. Robert had never been out from his dinner before without Janet's knowing in

advance that he was to be absent, and he had never been so late. She remained up beyond her usual time, and then she thought she had better go to bed lest Robert should be angry. So she made for him a very neat little supper out of the dinner that had been prepared in vain; and she wrote on a scrap of paper the not perhaps wholly coherent words, 'With Janet's love I'm gone to bed,' and so left the room. She spent a long time undressing and arranging her hair, the beautiful hair which it used to delight Robert so often to see her unfold and let loose around her shoulders, and which now she was letting loose for the gratification of no one. At last, when she had protracted the process to the utmost reasonable limits, she went to bed and for a while lay awake, looking out on the light of the lamp in the sitting-room as it shone through her doorway. For she had lowered Robert's lamp, and she knew that the moment he came in he would turn it more fully on; and then, even if she had fallen asleep in the meantime, she would know the moment she opened her eyes again if he had come home. Often she closed her eyes and tried to make believe to herself that she was sleeping, and then opened them again in the hope that she

might be gladdened by the stronger light, and she was each time disappointed. At last she really did fall asleep, and slept for at least two hours.

On first reawaking she forgot for the moment that Robert was not with her. Then, as consciousness began to struggle against lingering sleep, she thought he must be in the sitting-room; and then she became aware that the light was still low. She jumped out of bed, and, undressed as she was, ran into the sitting-room. The light was still low; Robert was not there. The little meal she had set out for him looked dismally full of ghastly suggestion as it lay there lonely and untasted. She looked at the little clock over the chimney-piece which Robert himself had tinkered at until he made it a very marvel of correct time-keeping, and she found that it was nearly half-past one. Then a reassuring thought occurred to her. Nothing was more likely than that her husband, when returning home, had seen Mr. Fielding's light burning in his room and gone in, and that they were now sitting together talking. The idea reassured her, but she was longing to be convinced that it was the truth. She feared her husband would be angry if she seemed in any way to be looking after



his movements ; and yet she could not remain in the condition of uncertainty which then tormented her. She thought she would go out on the corridor and listen, and perhaps hear their voices—Mr. Fielding often talked out in a very loud pleasant sort of way ; and if she did hear them she would go back to bed contented. She opened her door and crept out cautiously on the landing, a little astonished at first to find that the stairs were quite bright in the moonlight. She heard nothing, and so she went down a few more of the stairs and listened. When she came to the first lobby on her way down, the full moon suddenly looked in upon her through a window, and Janet was almost as much startled as if some ghost had appeared and turned the pale light of its wan eyes upon her. The little start, however, reminded her of other possibilities, and she thought she had better go no lower down then, for it would never do if Mr. Fielding or any other of the lodgers were to come upon her and see her in her night-dress. She hurried back to her room and put on clothes enough to make a colourable presentation of being fully dressed, and then softly went down the stairs again.

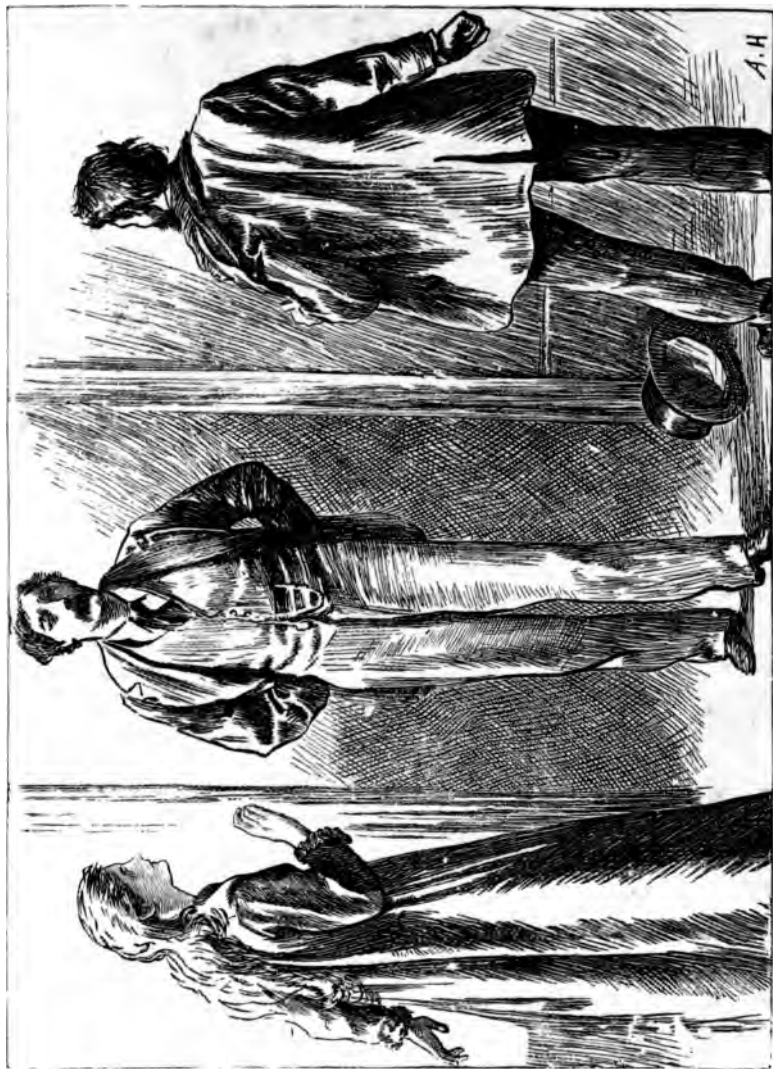
She stopped at Fielding's door in much trepidation. She listened, but for a time she could hear no sound except the quick beating of her heart. There was certainly a light inside, for she could see it streaming out under the door, but she could hear no voices. She was all trembling, and in her agitation she caught the handle of the door and it rattled loudly, and she heard some one start up inside. Her terror became unbearable. She was longing to fly from the spot and run madly up the stairs, but she could not move. At that moment the street door opened and her husband entered ; and, in the same instant, the other door opened as well and Fielding stood before her.

‘Janet!’ Charlton cried, and his face became white and he caught her fiercely by the arm.

‘Hullo, what are you two doing here?’ Fielding said, not yet understanding the scene in the least.

‘Oh, Robert, I was only looking for you ; I thought you were here,’ Janet moaned as she looked in terror into her husband's face and tried to twist herself from the tight clutch of his hand.

‘I say, Charlton, take care,’ Fielding said ; ‘you are hurting your wife. What are you about, man? Let



*'Oh, Mr. Fielding, don't mind him.'*

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go her arm.' At the same time Fielding put his hand on Charlton's shoulder. Charlton flung his wife from him and struck at Fielding wildly. Fielding put up his arm and stopped the blow.

'Oh, Mr. Fielding, don't mind him; oh, pray, pray don't!' Janet supplicated. 'He doesn't mean it; he doesn't know what he is doing.' Charlton, a little flushed at the consequences of his passionate outbreak, had fallen back a little, and seemed as if he were standing on the defensive.

'I believe he doesn't, indeed,' said Fielding. 'Don't be afraid, Janet; I shan't harm him. Look here, Charlton: hit one of your own size next, will you, there's a good fellow? Only Janet came between, I might have done you some harm, and I should have been sorry afterwards. And now will you tell me, if you are not mad or drunk, or mad and drunk, what this is all about?'

'I only came to see if you were there, Robert; that was all, indeed,' Janet pleaded piteously, looking up to Charlton, whose arm she held, with eyes in which simple truth shone yet more than even terror. Charlton had collected his senses now, and was quite

satisfied in his own mind that she was speaking the truth.

‘Well,’ Fielding asked again, ‘what is it all about? Have you been drinking more than was good for you, Charlton?’

He spoke with a certain sternness now that made Janet again move between him and her husband.

‘It was all a mistake, Fielding,’ Charlton said at last, gasping for breath; ‘I haven’t been drinking, but I came in suddenly and I couldn’t imagine what Janet wanted here.’

‘What a cad you make of yourself!’ Fielding said composedly. ‘I begin to think now that a kicking would have done you good. I am almost sorry I didn’t follow my first impulse; if you had been a stronger man I would have done it.’

‘I was in the wrong, Fielding; I admit it; I can only say that I am sorry and that I apologise.’

‘Apologise to your wife,’ Fielding said; ‘you owe her an apology. When I ask you to apologise to me, you can do so. I have to apologise to you, Mrs. Charlton, for bursting out on you so suddenly and frightening you. I didn’t know who was there; I heard

some noises, and I have had an odd suspicion lately that people have been coming into my room. I am afraid I frightened you, and I ask you to forgive me.'

He looked handsome and brave and genial, and very like a gentleman then indeed. He must have appeared, even in loyal Janet's eyes, something of a contrast to Robert Charlton, who seemed small, cowering, and confused, and at the same time malign. Fielding bowed to Janet and went into his room, and the dejected pair were left to make their way up the silent stairs by the light of the moon, the sudden intrusion of whose great white face had so much alarmed Janet.

'I oughtn't to have gone down, Robert,' she began, when they had got into their room; 'I know I oughtn't, and it was all my fault. Only for me this would not have happened; but I did not know where you were, and I was frightened, and I thought perhaps you might be with Mr. Fielding in his room as you are sometimes, you know; and so I went down, and then——'

The poor little beauty was really alarmed. She did not know what strange mood might show itself in her husband. Perhaps the mood she least expected was that which showed itself. Charlton sat down wearily, and

seemed hardly to be listening to what she was saying. At last he lifted his head and spoke to her but without looking at her.

‘It isn’t any matter, Janet; I mean, I don’t blame you; it was all my fault: I don’t well know what I was thinking of when I saw you and saw him. Go to bed, dear, now; that’s a good girl; go to bed, Janet.’

‘I have kept your supper for you; it is your dinner, in fact,’ Janet said, trying to look cheerful, and to put off leaving him. She longed now to throw her arms round him and kiss him, so dejected and deserted did he seem.

‘Thank you, Janet—thank you. You saw how he treated me?’ he said, changing his tone and suddenly looking up.

‘Well, Robert dear, you know you lost your temper, and you were very wild, and Mr. Fielding is tall and strong.’

Janet would have said, if she could see her way to it, that Fielding, being attacked without rhyme or reason by her husband, had according to her feminine idea behaved with wonderful forbearance in not employing his superior strength at once against his assailant.



But, although she never could quite get at the man's point of view for most things, she had a sort of suspicion that Robert would not care to hear much about forbearance of this kind. Still, it did seem to her that it was altogether Robert who had treated Mr. Fielding badly, not Mr. Fielding who had thus treated Robert.

‘He didn’t strike at me in return; you saw that?’

‘Yes, I saw that, of course,’ Janet said eagerly, rejoicing in the belief that her husband was after all looking at the thing in the right light, and about to launch into a panegyric on Fielding’s magnanimity.

‘Yes, of course you saw it,’ Charlton said bitterly; ‘and you heard too that he wouldn’t receive an apology from me? You know why, I suppose?’

‘Because he knew you didn’t mean anything, Robert——’

‘Because he considers me a cad; because he looks on me as beneath his notice, because I am not strong enough for him to strike, nor enough of a gentleman to be asked for an apology! Oh yes, he thinks to degrade me in my own eyes and—and in your eyes, I dare say—yes, I dare say in your eyes——’

‘Oh, Robert:’ and Janet attempted a caress of assurance that nothing could degrade him in her eyes. If she had said that no one but himself could do it, and hardly even he, it would have been only a truthful expression of the poor soul’s loyalty. He put away the caress.

‘Yes; it was done to degrade me in—everybody’s eyes; I dare say he will tell it to—everybody. How can I look—anybody in the face again?’

‘But, Robert, who will know? There was nobody there; the people in the house were all in bed——’

‘I wasn’t thinking of the people in the house,’ he caught her up almost fiercely. His quiet and broken mood seemed to be passing away.

Janet could do anything but restrain herself from trying to put things right where so useful an operation seemed to be within her power. She said in a soothing tone:—

‘But, Robert, we don’t know anybody out of the house except my aunt, and Mrs. Vanthorpe—and Mrs. Vanthorpe wouldn’t care, you know, even if she did hear of it—which she won’t.’

‘Who is he,’ Charlton said, jumping up, ‘to give

himself airs, I should like to know, and put on the ways of a gentleman, and think he has a right to call on people, on an equality, and not like me, taking orders for work? Who is he that has a right to degrade a man as good as himself in the eyes of—of people? I'll find out what he is—I'll show the world what he is. I'm on his track; I'll not fail, that I can tell him. I'll take down the pride of my gentleman. I have not had my suspicions for nothing. I'm glad I struck him. He can't deny that. Go to bed, Janet, it's no fault of yours. You are a good girl, much too good—never mind, only go to bed just now.'

Poor Janet could do nothing but creep to bed and feel very miserable. She did not go to sleep, but lay wondering why things all seemed to turn out so unpleasantly. She was uneasy about Robert's change of moods, and once she stole out of bed and peeped into the room where he sat. He had his head in his hands, and he was crying; positively crying, like a child or a woman. Never before in her life had Janet thought of the possibility of a man crying for anything but perhaps the death of someone he loved. She ran to her husband and flung herself on the ground at his knees and clasped

him in her arms, and begged of him in sobbing tones to tell her what was the matter.

‘The matter is,’ he said at last, ‘that I am a fool, Janet, and not like myself to-night. I ought to apologise to you for putting you out so, and I do apologise, Janet. You won’t refuse to accept my apology, will you?’

They had no more trouble for that night; but Gabrielle Vanthorpe’s spell did not seem thus far to be working with great success for the happiness of the Charltons.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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